A. Maria A. Kastrinou

POWER, SECT & STATE IN SYRIA

THE POLITICS OF MARRIAGE & IDENTITY AMONGST THE DRUZE

I.B.TAURIS

A. Maria A. Kastrinou is a lecturer in Social Anthropology at Brunel University London. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from Durham University and has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Syria. Her research has been published in the journals *History and Anthropology* and *Mediterranean Politics*.

'This is a highly important contribution to the scholarship on pre-2011 Syria and Syrians. Kastrinou has crafted a very rich ethnographic account of the politics of marriage and identity among the Druze in an urban village outside of Damascus. She has also intersected this account with deep analysis of the relationships between the state and folklore as well as analyses of debates among Damascene intellectuals. Kastrinou is able to convey not only scholarly excellence but deep emotional commitment to the people she has lived, laughed and cried with.'

Professor Annika Rabo, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

'This powerful study is valuable as a rare contemporary account of the Syrian Druze and, through its insights, how marriage becomes a central preoccupation in Syria. Kastrinou moves from intimate descriptions of an errant daughter's marriage to an expansive look at how power relations among Druze, the state, artists and intellectuals are expressed in the rituals and staged performances of marriages. Beyond seeing marriage as an important tool of elites, she shows us that sects and state seek validation through marriage idioms. Finally her discussion of sectarianism enlightens us about much that is going on in the Middle East today.'

Andrea B. Rugh, Adjunct Scholar, Middle East Institute, Washington DC

'Maria Kastrinou's elegant and sophisticated ethnography provides a moving account of daily life and philosophy within a Syrian Druze community during the last years of peace before the current civil war.'

Professor Robert H. Layton, Department of Anthropology, Durham University

'This is a wonderfully warm and evocative ethnography of a Druze community in a suburb of Damascus. Focusing specifically on acts of marriage, both as practised in the community and as staged through state-sponsored cultural festivities, Kastrinou brings to life the formation and dynamics of power relations within and between the Druze religious community, the state, artists and intellectuals. This is a book of immense importance, bringing together anthropological concepts of cultural intimacy, kinship theories, and nuptial power relations as a form of governmentality. It makes a powerful contribution to our understanding of the political economy of social identities.'

Dawn Chatty, Professor Emerita of Anthropology and Forced Migration, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

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For Eleftheria Kastrinou

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NOTE ON ARABIC TRANSLITERATION

I transliterate Arabic words based on the standard modern Arabic conventions used by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (*IJMES*), except in the case of proper nouns and words with a standard Romanisation, where I employ either the form most commonly used or the form nearest to the colloquial dialect of the Druze community in Jaramana.

GLOSSARY

'alaqa, 'alaqāt	relation
'ayb	shame, shameful
bakhūr	burning incense
bayt	house, family, lineage, or line in a poem
da'wa	religious call
ḥafleh	party
ḥammām	bath, akin to Turkish bath
jama'iyya	association, collective, club, charity
jawāz	marriage
juhhal	uninitiated Druze
leish	why, also the name of a dance troupe
maḍāfa	room for the reception of guests
mawqaf	Druze ceremonial space used for funerals
qahwa murrah	bitter Arabic coffee, mainly served in ceremonial situations
ṣaniyya	metallic tray used for serving food
shaykh, or *mashāykh*	religious elder
taqamuṣ	human-to-human reincarnation
tawḥīd	the religious doctrine followed by the Druze
tesht al-ra'abeh	a small bowl of fear
'uqqāl	Druze religious initiates
'urs	wedding

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Relying on the kindness of strangers is a characteristic of projects that span three countries and many years. I have been extremely blessed because most of these strangers have become family and fellow travellers. This work is not only my own, although the mistakes herein are, but is the result of such interactions, and I am very grateful to my past and present teachers, to friends and colleagues in Greece, Syria and the UK, and my families in Syria and in Greece.

This book is *for* Eleftheria Kastrinou, mother, comrade, fighter, who is always guiding me through the most difficult and worthwhile lessons in life. This book is *with* Steven Emery, the hand that holds my heart. It has grown with his love, partnership, and tireless commitment, and this too is as much his as mine.

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In Jaramana I was blessed to have been 'adopted' by two households and their extended families, and to have been embraced with so much generosity, kindness and love. It is not an exaggeration to note that in the families (*bayt*s) of Abud-Haddad and Ouward I was reborn, not only as an anthropologist but also as a better person. Without them, none of this would have been possible. My friends, particularly Zahra, Anna, Karem, Salih and Tariq allowed me into to their houses, companies and stories, whilst their comfort, warmth, sincerity and friendship have

sustained me well beyond fieldwork; their friendship is a precious gift. My sincere gratefulness goes to Abdul Nabi Isstaif, of Damascus University, and to his most kind and generous Damascene family, who took me in, and provided invaluable care, inspiration and support throughout the years. Salam Said has provided me with many insights into Syrian society and economy, as well as the invaluable support of a friend. Moreover, I would like to thank Salim Kheireddine, founder of the Druze Heritage Foundation in London, for his wise advice and continuous encouragement.

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abs/10.1080/13629395.2012.655046. Parts of the research presented in Chapter 3 have been included in a co-authored chapter with Robert Layton, in John Gledhill's forthcoming edited book *World Anthropologies In Practice*, published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2016. A condensed version of Chapter 5 appeared in *Jadaliyya* on 6 July 2011, and is available online: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1759/the-marriage-of-cadmus-and-harmony-and-the-burial-.

PREFACE: NOW AND THEN

Back then it was marriages which were reinforcing, forging, testing and rupturing social relations in Syria. Now, it is war. Back then sect was employed (but crucially hidden too) in the relatively benign arena of identity politics. Now it is employed (and never hidden) by those inside and outside of Syria to offer explanations, to dictate foreign policy, to torture and to massacre. It might seem somewhat pretentious, perverse even, to think academically of war as a way of relating. Indeed it is. Accordingly, this book is not an attempt to explain the causes of war in Syria, or to offer solutions. This book, however, argues that we can better understand and critique interpretations of the war in Syria by studying the complex and controversial history of sectarianism as a social phenomenon, and by thinking about how Syrian society relates through the idiom of marriage. For both war and marriage, in a way, walk the fine and precarious line between intimacy and violence: a line that has provided an analytic focus for the developing arguments of this book.

This book is based on empirical fieldwork conducted before the war and thus is an ethnographic glimpse of the life of the people who came to be family and friends, in a beautiful city that is now surrounded by war. It traces their lives and their everyday struggles, especially the ways they navigate the complexities of their families, work, sect and state. Marriage was indeed a pervasive way of relating back then, but my analytical focus upon nuptial relations was coloured from the first moments of my ethnographic encounters in Syria by the relationship between Zahra and her mother.

I met Zahra in the UK, where she first relayed her story to me, a story that, at the time, I had no idea would so strongly affect my research and

indeed the geography of the fieldsite itself. When Zahra first told me her story of love and rupture with her family and the religious community, I was deeply affected, in a personal way. Whilst I was geographically separated from Zahra during my fieldwork, her mother and I developed an intimate personal relationship in which Zahra's mother shared with me her fears of an imagined 'event' without knowing that that 'event' had already taken place, and I responded to her with the implicit knowledge that her fears had already materialised. Jackson (2006) notes that understanding others entails the small death of one's own preconceptions. In anthropology, this symbolic death coincides with a symbolic rebirth. This rebirth is not an objective understanding of the other (desirable but impossible) but an intimate relation, an intimate way of knowing and appreciating the parameters through which to know, even if that is manifested during silence. To me, Zahra's mother became my Syrian mother, the person who guided and helped me to be born within the contexts of the Druze Jaramana, a primary key informant, a guiding light, someone who connected me with broader social networks, and someone who shared so many intimate moments with me as I did with her. In the contexts of Jaramana, through the fictive kinship of the two families I lived with, I became an honorary or, as they called me, a 'Catholic' Druze. And what is more, I also became, as my two families put it, their daughter. However, within the realms of the anthropological liminality in which one often comes to call 'home' or 'family' more than one location, and between two sides or stories, that of Zahra and of her mother, my rebirth in Jaramana was a result of these events, and my socialisation a result of not only the moral tensions of my own positioning, but also of the intimate pain and agony that Zahra and her mother shared with me.

For me it was the intimate acquaintance with the event of Umm Nidal's (Zahra's mother) pain, more than anything, that coloured every marriage we attended and every social gathering we went to. It was her pain, her depression, and deteriorating mental state that confused me, shocked me, and intrigued me to figure out why marriage, a social happening that was of recurrent mention and importance within both the community as well as in most dance performances, or rather the cultural specific mode of expression, is of significance. Zahra's love and marriage story as much as her mother's and family's responses may be said to be singular events with specific responses. Regardless of their

specificity, such stories are not wholly atypical. Further to their socially recurrent motif, I was surprised and rather confused to 'discover' that issues of marriage contestations and negotiations also featured centrally with my research outside the domains of the Druze community in Jaramana. The more I interacted with dancers, directors and choreographers, the more I watched performances, rehearsals, and the more I attended dance festivals, all the more the motif of marriage became profound and recurrent. Most folklore festivals in Syria, organised and funded by the Syrian state, were staged marriage ceremonies. Performances by the two most famous professional dance troupes, Enana and Ornina, treated marriage as the primary structuring principle: the central act or the final conflict resolution. The two contemporary dance troupes that operate in Syria, Leish and Sima, also were influenced by marriage both thematically and structurally as an idiom and a site of intimacy and confrontation. To me, an anthropologist with a research predisposition for studying the political extensions of social dancing between three different publics in Syria, I eventually had to understand that dance was one example, one possibility out of many others, by which the recurrent pre-occupation with marriage arose and was dealt with. In short, as I was to realise, the connecting link, the theme that ran through all of my different research arenas and one of the most frequent and significant 'obsessions' of my informants was not dance but issues of relating expressed through the idiomatic use of marriage. In this respect, there is a slight irony in my anthropological endeavour depicted clearly in the last day of my prolonged fieldwork in Syria: celebrating my stay, my two Druze families and other relatives and friends came together on the night of my departure with a wedding feast, dressed me as a bride with jewellery and gifts, and cried with me – using the metaphor of a daughter leaving the household to marry away. More than anything else, it was this instance that signified my nuptial entry, rather than departure, into the intimate realm of the community.

When I was living in Damascus between 2008 and 2010, I liked to imagine the city as a woman. An old-fashioned, strict but impenetrably attractive spinster, who, although the years have carved their lines on her hands and face, continues to make herself up every day, wear silk clothes, expose her ancient treasures, dust her dowry, and never cease to reject her suitors. A woman of pride and habit: which is which, or what is what, a foreigner could never tell. A woman, Damascus, who does not

give her secrets and her habits away to strangers without the appropriate sacrifice. This is still how Damascus appears in my mind. It is difficult to reconcile the destruction after five years of war in a country where every road you travel, every stone you turn unveils millennia of history, of wars, of crossroads. The United Nations estimates the Syrian casualties at more than 250,000 people, the number of refugees over 4 million, with a further 7.6 million people internally displaced, of which 50 per cent is estimated to be children.

If Damascus provided the primary stage for my ethnographic endeavours, and marriage my primary analytic focus, it was my friends and families that provided everything else; love, laughter, support, guidance and lasting respect. Yet whilst my memories, my happiness shared with them, remain in Syria, many of them do not. And the pains of forbidden love and the breaking of social taboos have been confounded and eclipsed by the pains of war.

Now Tariq lives in a Refugee Centre in Spain. His visa to the UK was rejected. He shares his room with a guy from Aleppo and one from Sudan. He says it is OK. He waits uncertainly for his residence papers. At least he did not have to make the perilous Aegean journey from Turkey to the shores of Greek islands that an estimated more than a million people made in 2015. What happened to his younger brother was brutal: he was abducted for 52 days for ransom by self-proclaimed 'rebels'. I know very little about his abduction because the 20-year-old boy (I remember him as a handsome and kind of cocky teenager with gel on his hair and his mobile blasting out the latest tune) has not really told anyone what happened. All I know is that he was mostly blindfolded, and the fingers of his hands and feet were tied together. He was moved around areas of heavy shelling. Amidst one bombardment, he was left alone on a terrace. He spent a week in a bathtub. Other details I do not know. The family took him to the hospital after, they said he will be OK. After his return from his abductions, he spent about a month in the state prison. There he contracted scabies – but we fear the signs that do not show.

The rest of the company, my friends, have had better luck. Karem is in Dubai, having left Syria when military conscription caught up with him; now he is a manager at an architectural firm. Anna is in Germany, on a prestigious scholarship, with a promising academic future ahead of her. Salih, the philosopher without a degree, was admitted as a student to the philosophy department at Damascus University. He has

stubbornly stayed back in Jaramana, making do with part-time jobs, probably actively resisting his parents' pleas to return to the relative safety of his village in Suwayda. I think he was disappointed with the revolution early on, but he continues to take photographs. The families are fine. Umm Nidal's father died when he almost reached a hundred. Nidal got married and has a beautiful daughter; his apartment is finished and furnished. Father and daughter, Abu Nidal and Zahra made contact after Abu Nidal's brief arrest by the security forces in Syria. The war has not mellowed Umm Nidal, who still condemns Zahra for marrying outside the Druze sect. From Tariq's family, his youngest sister got engaged and is preparing to marry. The groom is a distant relative nine years older, but she seems to like him a lot – especially if I consider all the Facebook romance that these two publicly display. No other births yet. Three deaths, distant relatives, so far.

The news from Raqqa is not good. I have lost touch with them for two years now. Manal's mobile is not working. Sulayman tells me they have moved out of the town and back to the grandmother's village. The Islamic State (IS) has made Raqqa the capital of the Caliphate. I miss them all so much. I wonder if Manal found her ideal Muslim to marry. If Umm and Abu Talal have found a way around the smoking ban. If the grandmother still makes Bedouin cheese and butter every day.

But how did it all begin? Did it start from a man's self-immolation in Tunisia? Did it start in Daraa during a protest or a festival? How can intimacy breed so much violence and what can a wedding in Jaramana tell us about power, sect and state in Syria?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Power, Sect and State: An Introduction

Caught between conflicting historical fantasies of an exotic Orient and images of the oppressive and threatening Other, Syria embodies both the colonial attraction of Arabesque *par excellance* simultaneously along with images of violence, sectarian warfare and fears of civilisation clashes. In anthropology, the road to Damascus is a road less travelled, a road perilously understudied.[1] Venturing on such a road, this book is one of few contemporary ethnographic accounts situated amongst the Syrian Druze.[2]

Anchored in political anthropology, this work focuses on power, sect and state in Syria and how these become articulated through the intersections and interstices of global geopolitics, statecraft and the embodied cultural politics of everyday life. Its main aim is to describe and analyse the formation and dynamics of power relations within and between the Druze religious community, the state, artists and intellectuals. This is achieved by analysing the poetics and politics of embodied social ritual formations and transformations, specifically through acts of marriages, practised in the community, and staged through state-sponsored cultural festivities and in European-funded art performances.

Marriages, in most cultural contexts, are pivotal transformative rituals that sanction and appropriate unions, that perform and embody the social reproduction of communities and society at large. In pre-war Syria, however, marriages were something more, and they were

everywhere: on television, in folklore festivals, in independent dance performances, and in everyday discussions. Practised beyond the confines of religious and ethnic locales, these nuptials were the ritual metaphors that reified sectarian communities and saturated national policy. This book ethnographically details contests between and within sect and state through social and political struggles upon and for the body – particularly the nuptial body. Specifically, the book shows how marriage practices rather than being homogeneous and traditional are the intimate and violent sites of gendered, classed and sectarian struggles. As sites of struggle, marriages tell us a lot about local power relations and politics. As embodied performances, marriages are instantiations of a nuptial intimacy: the reification of abstract notions such as 'sect' or 'state' through the idiom of marriage in everyday practice. Inspired by, but not completely loyal to, Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy (2005 [1997], see Chapter 4), intimacy is traced in movements, bodies and relations through which people, places, institutions and other abstractions come closer, and become tactile, specific, familiar. Violence within the realm of intimacy (Appadurai 1998) refers particularly to the poetics of violence as a result of closeness and intimacy, as the result of the touch (Deleuze and Guattari 2005 [1987]; Manning 2007). Power relations are traced through the construction of nuptial bodies as relational spaces and sites of intimacy and violence, or violent intimacy, in contemporary Syria. An alternative political view to kinship theories, this book argues that bodies become intimate through relational practices such as marriages, but this is a form of intimacy that may readily turn into violence. In this direction 'nuptial bodies' and nuptial power relations refer to two interrelated notions: first, to the nexus of pervasive relations that are created and sustained through the idiom of kinship and the practice of endogamy; and secondly, as a form of governmentality, of knowing and conducting relations in and beyond marriage in contemporary Syria.

By looking at marriages in three different but interconnected public arenas, the book is able to locate and analyse those contentious spaces in which local religious communities, authoritarian state policies, and agents of neoliberal globalisation converge and collide, and thus offer a grounded empirical depiction of contemporary social and political struggles in Syria. Furthermore, looking at everyday and state politics immediately prior to the so-called Arab Spring, the war in Syria

and its sectarian ripples across the Middle East, this book contributes to understanding the causes of social change from the micro-level perspective of local communities.

Finally, I hope that this work provides the reader with a critical analysis to the political economy of social identities. By looking at how secularist, nationalist, Islamist and sectarian identities are formed, transformed and mobilised, I have attempted to locate how representations, practices and geographies of the nation and the sect may challenge, reinforce or bypass state sovereignty and form alternative political imaginaries and forms of belonging, hence capturing ethnographically the unequal co-construction between formations of the state and the politics of identity and belonging. In this way, I hope, that its ethnographic detail will contribute to larger debates regarding the role of the state and the nation, and the political subjects these summon.

Since my initial study amongst the Druze community in Damascus, much has changed in Syria and the wider Middle East. Whilst in the short space of four years the country has been traumatically transformed, the original research findings enclosed in this book, not only offer a glimpse of pre-war Syria but also underscore the covert kinds of violence that pre-dated the current war. The war in Syria has necessarily extended my own research beyond its original scope in order to make sense of the current conflict. Henceforth, beyond ethnographic foregrounding, I have found it necessary to perform a double act: in the first instance, I have been forced to 'dig' into the past in order to understand the historical emergence of sectarian identities as forms of political representation from the late Ottoman Empire to the contemporary Baʿth regime. This move was not stylistic but necessary since the date for the first ever 'sectarian' conflict in the Levant goes back to 1860. If we could 'date' sectarianism, then surely this demonstrates that explanations for the war as the latest expression of an Islamic conflict between Sunnis and Shiʿas dating back to AD 300 are somewhat problematic. At the same time, understanding sectarianism as a historically contingent socio-political project that creates specific politics of statecraft and particular political subjectivities is crucial to understanding those processes, dynamics and alternative forms of belonging that are being generated. As my research on the historical formations of sect and state continues, I have opted here to include in this introduction a brief overview of the historical

formations and transformations of sectarian identities as the background to the ethnography that follows in the later chapters.

The second part of this double act was to move beyond my anthropological comfort zone of local politics and into the realm of international politics and the economics of war. This was a necessary move because the war in Syria cannot be understood as only a 'Syrian' war; more importantly however, I delved into international politics and economics in order to be true to the basis of the anthropological profession, namely the responsibility to take our informants seriously (Kirtsoglou 2013). This obligation became all the more astute in the aftermath of the chemical attacks in the Ghouta region of Damascus in August 2013. Trying to make sense of the tragic and absurd information that we got from media sources, both my research assistant in Jaramana, the Druze neighbourhood close to the site of the chemical attack, and me in the United Kingdom, were constantly exchanging and cross-checking the latest news from social media and local contacts. As the shocking realisation of what had happened soaked in, along with the confusion and uncertainty as to the identities of the perpetrators and their motives, Tariq told me: 'I wish they could both [government and opposition] go away. Just take their war in another place. They fight *we* die.'

Tariq's words denote the increasing desperation of Syrian civilians, initially minorities but increasingly majorities as well. This loss of hope that best characterises Tariq's comments, comes at the realisation that this war in Syria now, is somehow a much larger war, a war that essentially is not being fought *for* them. And hence the sadness and the cynicism in my friends' voice when they tell me of yet another death: 'He died,' they will say, followed by 'He was martyred. And for what? *Ya haram*.' Dying for no cause is equivalent to living for nothing, and this is precisely how many of my friends describe the situation. As an anthropologist, then, my obligation is to investigate, describe and analyse who 'they' are that make the 'we' in Tariq's quote die, who 'they' are and what are they fighting for? In effect, taking our informants seriously means situating them within the global power struggles in which they are enmeshed, taking seriously their desperation, their sense of powerlessness.

I locate sectarianism historically and discursively, beginning with the late Ottoman Empire. The sections that follow foreground historically

and analytically the main terms of this study: sectarianism, state, identity. The chapter synopsis is followed by a brief note on methodology.

Locating Sectarianism: The Historical Making of Sovereignty in Syria

In 1860 unprecedented violence climaxed in Mount Lebanon. It is estimated that 10,000 people died, hundreds of villages were pillaged and burned, and a massive exodus of the Druze population took place from Lebanon to Syria. Known as the Druze–Maronite massacre – a peasant uprising led by Tanyus Shahin turned into the first distinctly modern sectarian conflict. The violence, and its closure, assembled all the major forces and players of the time: the Ottoman state and European powers, local notables and village populations (Makdisi 2000a). This assemblage foreshadowed the things to come: the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, European colonialism and imperialism in the Middle East, the transformation of notable families into national elites, the ushering in of mass politics and hence the transformation in forms of loyalty and political belonging from peasant to citizen. Since then, sectarianism – namely affiliation or alliance within a religious or ethnic sub-group – often features as the natural, primordial basis of citizenship in Lebanon and Syria. For example, Rabinovich argues that:

> Syria's repeated oscillation between unity and fragmentation left an obvious mark on the relationship between the 'compact minorities' and the Syrian State [. . .] Small minorities that have practiced and developed the art of survival dread the need to choose between conflicting demands for their loyalty and commitment.
>
> (Rabinovich 1979: 696)

Writing on sect–state relations in Syria in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the French Mandate, Rabinovich describes Druze and Alawi communities as 'compact minorities' based on the similarities between them, such as being 'closely-knit communities based on the solidarity of underprivileged and radical Shiite sects'

(Rabinovich 1979: 694). In this classic description an inherent divide between Sunni and Shiʻa is presumed to exist and to shape politics, alongside the assumed unchanging homogeneity of the two populations. That the Druze spearheaded the national revolution against the French in 1925–7 is analysed as a strategic manoeuvring of Druze elites: 'The political programme of the Druze Revolt was couched in Syrian and Arab nationalist terms, but this should not be taken to mean that the Druze community [. . .] sought to amalgamate themselves into the Syrian State' (Rabinovich 1979: 702). Although both 'sectarianism' (*ta'ifiyyah*) and related notions such as 'tribalism' are increasingly questioned by historians (Neep 2012; White 2012) and anthropologists (Chatty 2013; Gonzalez 2009; Salamandra 2013), in understanding current political conflicts they are still deployed in softer forms, as the 'natural and culturally specific bases of politics in the Middle East' (van Dam 2011: 144).

In his compelling study of mass politics in Syria between 1918 and 1920, Gelvin argues that the historical inquiry of nationalism in the Middle East has but ignored or deemed as anomalous mass politics and mobilisations, instead focusing on narrow intellectual elites and their renditions of political ideologies (1998: 1–11). According to Gelvin's critique of idealist (intellectual) history:

> Because the full recovery of the Arab *ethnie* merely awaited the proper speculative advancement and political conjuncture, historians of nationalism in the region have spent an inordinate amount of time attempting to uncover the contributions made by various intellectuals to the 'rediscovery' and elucidation of that identity, the chain through which an Arab 'protonationalism' and nationalism were transmitted from generation to generation, and the time of diffusion of a paradigmatic nationalism throughout the population of the Arab Middle East.
>
> (Gelvin 1998: 6)

This critique applies to narratives of sectarianism, confessionalism and communalism, as the unchanging primordial basis of political belonging in the Middle East. In more ways than one, ideologically homogenous and historically static renditions of sectarianism, vis-à-vis its apparent antithesis in universalist renditions of political Islam,

continue to shape portrayals of the participation, representation and conflict in and beyond Syria, Lebanon and Iraq (Eickelman and Piscatori 2004; Haynes 2010). These particularist or universalist ideological formations have often been studied as the main setbacks to the realisation of Arab nationalism, and hence the modernisation of state and citizens (Gelvin 1998: 5–8). Middle Eastern states, then, are described as 'failed' because modernisation processes have not produced a singular and secular political imagination out of the dissonance of Arabism and nationalism (Smith 1991).

***

With sectarian clashes having a profound impact on both Syria's society and sovereignty, this section takes claims of 'sectarianism' seriously by combining historical and political economy approaches towards an anthropologically and historically grounded understanding of sovereignty and representation in the historical area of Greater Syria (*Balād al-Shām*). In this way, the first aim is to dislocate the presumed naturalness of sectarianism; to achieve this, 'sectarianism' is set in historical context and redefined within the political economy of the Syrian state and the shifting aesthetics of political representation. This objective fits within a growing body of literature that questions modernity as a Western 'export' whilst detailing relations between persons and objects in Ottoman Syria (Mundy and Smith 2007); and investigates the political economy of authoritarian resilience (Haddad 2012). If sectarianism is not a natural, unchanging characteristic but a historical phenomenon, when and how did it come to be? How did it affect or transform social and political forms of belonging? And, are such transformations in belonging and political subjectivity in any way related to broader transformations in state formation? How may anthropology aid in the understanding of political subjectivity amongst not only elites but everyday people too?

In order to answer these questions, the historical emergence of sectarianism is traced as a dynamic but particular dialectical *relationship* between political subjectivities and the state, its connection with popular demands for political representation, and the consequences of using religion as the basis of imagined state communities. To achieve this, sectarianism is first defined in terms of identity formation, practice, ideology and the political subjects it produces. Secondly, this definition

needs to be set in a historical context: what were the historical processes in the Middle East and Europe before the sectarian massacre of 1860? Finally, how, for the first time in Mount Lebanon, did an uprising led by a peasant help to radically transform 'common villagers' (*ahali*) from politically abject into modern political subjects?

Steps Towards a Definition of Sectarianism: Identity, Subject, State

Defining sectarianism is a difficult endeavour because the word simultaneously connotes social practices, cultural ideas about the person and its relation to the cosmos, as well as relations of power between state and subject. Because sectarianism evokes a wide range of social practices, cultural identities and political relations, its boundaries are not clear. In Rabinovich's argument, religious and social practices of collective identities are treated as evidence of a distinct political consciousness inherent in 'compact minorities': compact here appears to mean homogenous social, religious and political identification. But are sectarian practices, such as endogamous marriage, or religious beliefs, such as same-sect reincarnation, evidence for *political* autonomy? Do sectarian practices and beliefs influence personal or collective relations to a central state structure and affect governmental representation? In order to disentangle the social from the religious and the political in defining sectarianism, this section briefly positions sectarianism within broader debates of identity and history, before providing the schema for a definition of sectarianism.

How people identify with one another, form groups and differentiate themselves is a key question in and beyond anthropology. Answers to this question range widely, some of which include, for example, Huntington's thesis on the clash of civilisations: that there are inherent, essential and insurmountable cultural differences between Christian West and Muslim East (Huntington 1993; cf. Ali 2003). Instrumentalist theories in political science describe identity formation within the context of rational individuals manipulating political identities towards the fulfilment of their own ends (Halliday 2000). Anthropologically informed perspectives view identity as a relational process of boundary formation, inclusion/exclusion (Barth 1969), used often as an idiom for kinship (Banks 1996), and as a practice through which peoples and bodies become produced, reproduced and socially transformed (Bourdieu 2005 [1990]; Carrithers *et al.* 1985). Following this line of enquiry, in

order to interrogate the dynamics of identity as the formation of political subjects and subjectivities, and in order to probe how political subjects emerge historically, the analysis will 'scale-up', turning to Michel Foucault's ideas of power, discourse and the emergence of the political subject. This is a necessary move in order to connect identities, and specifically the historical emergence of certain identities, to broader political and economic processes such as the formation of the modern state (Foucault 1984, 1998 [1978]).

In a historical investigation into how 'human beings are made subjects' (1982: 777), Foucault interrogates the ways certain identities become possible and are constituted. His particular understanding of 'history' as archaeology is vital here as 'history' itself is traced in sudden ruptures and discontinuous 'epochs' in which different 'discourses' operate (Foucault 2005 [1970]). A 'discourse' does not refer to the technique or the process of discoursing, but what is possible to say and to think within a system of articulating and practising knowledge: what can be true in a given historical period, within a specific system of knowledge and power whereby different regimes of truth control, constrain, limit, regulate and determine what can be thought. It is in this broad context that Foucault places both subject and power as mutually related, and hence, his use of 'power' is essentially productive:

> the exercise of power is not violence; nor is it a consent which, implicitly, is renewable. It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.
>
> (Foucault 1982: 789)

'Power' is not about constraining, enabling, or even setting the agenda, power is horizontal and totalising; it is the power to bring about, to produce certain subjectivities, individuals, environments, to manage bodies, time and space in particular ways (Mitchell 2006 [1999]). Hence, in different historical conjunctures the diverse and complex webs of knowledge and power give rise, or *produce different kinds of subjects*, with two meanings: 'subject to someone else by control and dependence; and

tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subjects to,' (Foucault 1982: 781).

On this trail, the key question is not how social and political subjectivities relate to the state or to power in a general way, but rather what kinds of political subjectivities are produced, indeed become possible, in different epochs under different regimes of power-knowledge (Mitchell 2006). Subsequently, in order to define sectarianism as a certain type of subjectivity, one must trace those political and economic transformations in power relations within and between local elites, villagers, the Ottoman state and European expansion. How did the centralisation of the state, its legal and administrative apparatuses, the development of mercantile commerce and technology transform the Sultan, the notable and the common peasant in the Ottoman Empire? In Mount Lebanon, how did the *ahali* (the Druze and Christian common villagers) with their popular sectarian vision, come to challenge the established social hierarchies, to break through the chasm between *ahali* and *a'yan* (the 'face' of the community, including noble families and religious authorities)? I suggest that the extreme and historically unique violence in 1860 in Mount Lebanon is intrinsically connected to the transformation of political subjectivity, specifically the transformation of the *ahali* from passive, ignorant, and loyal 'imperial subjects', from objects of the Sultan and lord, to active, political subjects. This transformation cannot be understood except by understanding of the historical particularities through which the modern state itself has emerged.

This is not to reify the 'state' as an all-powerful, homogeneous, or inevitable thing or process, but to trace the interrelated process of contemporary state formation and the emergence of specific political subjectivities:

> It is certain that in contemporary societies the state is not simply one of the forms or specific situations of the exercise of power – even if it is the most important – but that in a certain way all other forms of power relation must refer to it. But this is not because they are derived from it; it is rather because power relations have come more and more under state control [. . .] one could say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated,

> rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions.
>
> (Foucault 1982: 793)

By governmentality, Foucault refers 'not so much the *étatisation* of society, as the "governmentalisation" of the state', the state as 'mythicized abstraction' that extends and is to be found in the dispersal of its techniques into the relationships between apparatuses, subjects and things (Foucault 2005: 142).[3] In order to characterise the progressive governmentalisation of power relations I will trace the historical emergence of the contemporary state, and hence the political subjectivities such as forms of national belonging and citizenship that subsequently became possible. When does, then, the story of what we recognise as the modern form of the state, with its administrative bureaucracies, its representative government and its modern citizenry, begin? According to Foucault, both state and citizen are to be traced back as emerging out of the political, social and economic processes set in motion in Europe from the sixteenth century on, particularly after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which made possible new and radical conglomerations of power-knowledge (Foucault 1982: 782). Consider, for example, Machiavelli's prince who is 'by definition unique in his principality and occupies a position of externality and transcendence' (Foucault 2005: 134). With the development and elaboration of sovereign boundaries, the socio-economic shifts from feudalism to mercantilism and the national economy, the exteriority of the Machiavellian Prince is relevant no more. Divine jurisprudence – meaning that the king or prince represented God's divine will, not that of his peasants or serfs, who owed to him both their loyalty and their lives – changes as the social contract between ruler and ruled dislodges the ancient regime.

By the eighteenth century (Foucault 1991a [1977], 1998 [1978], 2005 [1970]), a dramatic shift has taken place in power-knowledge, which is characterised in the transformation of 'right over death' (simply put, the medieval right of the lord to take the life of his subjects) to 'power over life': 'Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its domination; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it' (Foucault 1998 [1978]: 138). The change from the *divinity* of the king to the *representation* and care for the newly constituted 'population' is accompanied by the concentration of decision making

into politico-legal mechanisms and socio-economic apparatuses, which work towards the formation, management and regulation of the population. The idea of the 'state' appears then an elusive central tenet, internal and totalising, within and beyond its legal canons, economic industries, regulatory bureaucracies, administrative and governmental apparatuses, a 'mythicised abstraction' that extends and it is to be found in the dispersal of its techniques into the relationships between apparatuses, subjects and things.

It is in the vicinity of such historical processes that the state emerges as the once centralised yet dispersed form of power, whose main concern lies with the regulation and maintenance of the 'population' within a given territorial space. These processes called for new kinds of kings and subjects to be produced, namely, a central state which represents the views of the majority of its population – now turned citizens. And yet, what is profoundly and recognisably 'modern' in these developments is, on one the hand, the concentration of power in state institutions, and on the other hand, the dispersal of governmental techniques beyond the state and into its (newly made) subjects.

Part of this modern, in the sense of historically recent, phenomenon of the state is that *political representation* becomes the basis of the social contract between citizen and state. The realm of politics now opens itself to issues of legitimacy and representation. Historical mythologies emerge and take the shape of imagined communities under the umbrella of nationalism (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 2006 [1983]; Gellner 1983; Layton 2006). Nationalism emerges as one of the ideological projects and legitimators of the state (Abrams 2006). With the emergence of modern state and citizenship, collective identities are not just local relational indicators of exclusion and inclusion, but the formative prescription for the relation between each citizen and the state. Put differently, once local and fluid social identities are transformed into political measures for the representation of the population, it is here that majorities and minorities, national, ethnic, religious but always already political, emerge at the structural heart of the modern state (Appadurai 2006; Mamdani 2012). It is in this context that sectarianism must be located, as the politicisation and essentialisation of local forms of identity construction through which representation between citizen and state occurs. Is, then, sectarianism a political process akin to nationalism (cf. Kedourie 1970)?

Ussama Makdisi's inspiring and meticulous work provides the framework for understanding how sectarianism is a particularly modern phenomenon through his careful tracing of the 1860 Maronite–Druze conflict in Lebanon (Makdisi 2000a, 2000b). We cannot possibly take it for granted that social groups, ethnic, religious or anything else, remain constant through time; similarly we cannot possibly accept at face value that change is the prerogative of only Western history. For the purposes of this book, I follow Makdisi's definition of sectarianism as both a *practice* through which historically specific collective identities are formed, and as a *discourse*, an ideology that imagines difference and constitutes Others on the basis of eternal religious or ethnic differences. Specifically, sectarianism may be defined as:

> a practice that developed out of, and must be understood in the context of, nineteenth-century Ottoman reform. Second, it is a discourse that is scripted as the other Other to various competing Ottoman, European, and Lebanese narratives of modernization. [...] a discourse – as the set of assumptions and writings that described this changing subjectivity within a narrative of Ottoman, European, and Lebanese modernization.
>
> (Makdisi 2000a: 5–6)

It is between and within formations of the state and subject that practices and ideological discourses of sectarianism must be probed. As representation of the people by the state became one of the defining characteristics of the modern state, the particular historical circumstances in Mount Lebanon meant that religion, rather than ethnicity, provided the mythology necessary for the creation of an imagined community through which representation and political legitimacy became possible.

The Governmentalisation of Violence in Mount Lebanon: Power, Knowledge and the Foundation of Minorities

Economic and political transformations in Europe produced new formations of power relations such as a central state, citizenship and political representation. The development of capitalism, with global commerce and competition for new markets between emerging national states inevitably touched, and did so unequally, the Ottoman Empire:

> The salience of commercial relations and associated institutions thus increased for many inhabitants of the empire who now produced crops destined for regional and international markets, competed with workers overseas, sold their labour, loaned or borrowed money at usurious rates, and participated as middlemen and factors in foreign trade. The expansion of commercial relations was facilitated by the second phenomenon, the attempts made by the Ottoman government throughout the century to strengthen and rationalise central control [. . .] because governmental policies promoted the construction of institutions that were congruent with those of Europe, they abetted the further penetration of European capital and, consequently, the diffusion of commercial relations throughout the empire.
>
> (Gelvin 1998: 13)

As European capital penetrated the Ottoman Empire, expansionist European powers, such as France, Britain and Italy, were able to mobilise religious belonging, particularly strategising the 'common' Christianity, in order to fragment political power without immediately killing the 'sick man of Europe'. Mahmood traces the association of religious minorities to human rights discourses early in the Ottoman Empire as a European strategy of fragmenting and contesting Ottoman authorities through the construction of Christian religious protectorates within its borders, dating as far back as the sixteenth century:

> as we ponder the problem of religious sectarianism in the modern period, one might want to ask not so much what inhibits the realization of religious freedom (as if religious freedom were an ahistorical and universally valid good) but how the national and international regulation and protection of religious minorities makes specific notions of freedom and unfreedom possible and imaginable.
>
> (Mahmood 2012: 419)

Through diplomatic and religious missions, these processes were consolidated from the nineteenth century onwards through the conscious efforts of colonial powers to carve out spheres of influence by dismembering and imposing (or trying to impose) territorial

boundaries upon religio-ethnic identities. Furthermore, the development of sectarianism as a practice and a discourse of political belonging and representation is closely associated with the broader ideological merits of 'self-determination'. This is a doctrine that was enshrined within Wilson's Fourteen Points at the end of World War I and which formed the basis for the ideological rendering of the League of Nations. 'Self-determination' was an oversimplified concept that arranged political identities on the basis of race or ethnicity. Timothy Mitchell argues that 'since no population was ethnically homogeneous, this created the possibility of identifying or shaping groups as "minorities". The imperial powers could then claim the duty to protect them as an endangered fragment of the population' (2011: 99). Although different religious communities existed prior to the creation and political manipulation of minorities, religion was neither a political identity, nor *de facto* imprinted onto geographical territory. These two processes, the sectarian grand idiom of identity as imagined community, and its mapping onto geographical sovereignty, are two basic and general distinctions between pre-modern and modern state formations.

Although systemic and structural forces shifted the balance of power in the Middle East and altered the face of the state, it would be misleading to imagine such forces as unilinear and externally imposed. The violence in Mount Lebanon in 1860 was of local making, and as such it shocked the external powers it engaged, be they the Ottomans or the French. It was a violence perpetrated by the usual absent presences of history, the unlikely heroes, the *abjects*: the common villagers and peasants. In a sense, it is this unique unprecedented violence, the rupture of one epoch and start of another, that in its clear exercise of agency, the *ahali* that fought and killed and died, usher in modern representative politics:

> The story begins [. . .] when local Lebanese society was opened, and indeed opened itself, to Ottoman and European discourses of reform that made religion the site of a colonial encounter between a self-styled 'Christian' West and what it saw as its perennial adversary, an 'Islamic' Ottoman Empire. This encounter profoundly altered the meaning of religion in the multiconfessional society of Mount Lebanon because it emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political

> claims. [. . .] From the outset, therefore, it is imperative to dispel any illusion that sectarianism is simply or exclusively a native malignancy or a foreign conspiracy. Sectarianism can be narrated only by continually acknowledging and referring to both indigenous and imperial histories, which interacted – both collided and collaborated – to produce a new historical imagination. Sectarianism is a modern story, and, for those intimately involved in its unfolding, it is *the* modern story – a story that has and that continues to define and dominate their lives.
>
> (Makdisi 2000a: 2–3)

But, what was the 'meaning of religion in the multiconfessional society of Mount Lebanon' prior to the end of the *ancien régime* in 1860?

Christians, specifically Maronites persecuted in the time of the Byzantine Empire, and Muslims, mostly Druze that had fled the Fatimid dynasty in the eleventh century, lived in adjacent or mixed villages in Mount Lebanon. For those who were *ahali* and therefore not nobility, life and work was determined by the agricultural cycle (the area was famous for silk production), the passing of the seasons and their marking through rites and festivities – cultural practices that were shared across Druze and Maronite *ahali* (Makdisi 2000a: 30). Although in their daily lives religion was crucially important, indeed conversion to a different religion was a serious sin (Makdisi 2000b: 187), religion did not constitute a political identity:

> If the public, political culture of Mount Lebanon functioned through an unspoken recognition of the temporality of loyalty – no Ottoman governor lived forever and no ruler could rely on the automatic allegiance of his subordinates, but had to be constantly alert to shifting alliances – the private cultures of faith depended on the strict and absolute loyalty of their respective believers.
>
> (Makdisi 2000b: 186)

The concept of good government (*hüsn-i idare*, cf. Makdisi 2000b: 184) encompassed the fact that the Ottoman Empire did not force its conquered populations to be ideologically or culturally homogeneous. Instead, its vast heterogeneous make-up and its success rested on the recognition of the importance of difference – hence the large role that

local politics played in the administration of its vast territories. Reliance on, and alliance with, local nobility – those economically and socially powerful families – was key in the administration and communication between the Sultan and his subjects. Notable families were local elites that mediated the everyday politics of different geographic locations, collected taxes, and managed the everyday aspects of production and administration in the Empire (Khoury 1991a). It was not religious affiliation that precipitated the layering of politics in the Ottoman Empire, but the politics of nobility: notable families, with their associations of locality and religion, that mediated the political, legal and administrative space between the Sultan and his imperial subject.

Hence, within local communities the defining feature of social hierarchy and classification was rank and social status *not* religion: 'Many notables lived in palaces, entertained lavishly, and even travelled. Myriad differences nuanced their relationships, but between them and the *ahali* of Mount Lebanon was a vast chasm, one defined not only by material wealth but by social custom' (Makdisi 2000a: 34). Examples of this defining difference are many. Through kinship, referring to both descent and alliance, nobility was established and maintained. For instance notable families, such as the powerful Shihabs, would have both Christian and Muslim branches of the family (Makdisi 2000a: 35). Although less frequent, interfaith marriages building alliances between notable families were not unknown (Makdisi 2000a: 35–7); rather unknown or unthinkable were marriages between nobility and the *ahali*, who even required their lord's permission in order to get married in amongst themselves (Makdisi 2000a). The practice of marrying according to rank and not to faith has remained as the vestige of the only Emir-ranking Druze family, the Joumblatt family, whose sect exogamy is hence 'excused' or overlooked by the Druze religious and popular opinion.

Similarity in rank overrode similarity in religion, not only in terms of kinship, but in all aspects of social, political and economic life in Mount Lebanon. Indeed, the word 'sectarianism' (*ta'ifa*) prior to mid-nineteenth century had a completely different meaning: it referred to a 'family of rank regardless of its religious persuasion' (Makdisi 2000a: 35). History was written exclusively as elite biographies as genealogical depth, time and import would be attributed by chroniclers to the intricacies of power struggles between competing notables (Makdisi 2000b: 186). Christian and Druze elites were considered to be the eyes and the face of the

community *(awjuh al-bilad* in Arabic and *söz sahibleri* in Ottoman, see Makdisi 2000b: 188), their role was to represent the Sultan's command and maintain the loyalty of his subjects. In this way, politics was the distinct monopoly of the notable families in Mount Lebanon: common villagers were viewed as incapable of ruling themselves, as incapable of bearing a public face. Power, knowledge and political agency were all concentrated and monopolised by local notables (Makdisi 2000a: 28–50). Neither politics nor knowledge, which were discourses intimately interweaved, were 'open' to all. This secular but exclusive discourse was embodied not only in imperial law, but also through everyday practices, beyond kinship and intermarriage, encapsulating memory and history as an elite monopoly.

A stark embodiment of the 'chasm' between the elite and the *ahali* was violence and punishment. As the public realm that included politics, history and knowledge were imagined to be the exclusive realm of the *a'yan*, peasants and common villagers were thought of as childlike and emotive, unable to instigate or plot insurrections (Makdisi 2000a: 48–49). Instead, the *ahali* were prone to notable corruption (*ifsad*), whereby a rival notable would stir the passions of the common folk for his own advancement. 'Corrupting' was a great sin affordable only to notables (Makdisi 2000a: 45), and punishment of such crimes also embodied this discursive 'chasm' between *a'yan* and *ahali*:

> Christians and Druzes were punished in the same manner; commoners and notables were not [. . .] Notables were executed by strangulation, while commoners were hanged [. . .] Since a notable was the face and voice of respectable society, mutilation, especially blinding and muting, rendered a notable unfit to govern.
>
> (Makdisi 2000a: 45)

The violence that took place in Mount Lebanon between 1858 and 1860 defied these carefully embodied poetics. It was chaotic: it challenged both the aesthetics and the politics of the old regime (Makdisi 2000b: 192–5). It ravaged the monopoly of power-knowledge: the *ahali* now transformed into *jumhur* (the general population), organised itself into popular committees, demanded political representation, and, by re-appropriating Tanzimat reforms, particularly the Hatay Decree (1939) that guarantees religious equality amongst all the subjects of the empire,

it attempted to usher popular representation through a populist sectarian vision and hence to break the trail of political monopoly and rank as 'an inviolable reflection of the will of God' (Makdisi 2000a: 41). It was this at this junction, 'the proclamation – if not fulfilment – of a subversive sectarian history and geography' (Makdisi 2000b: 206), that a contemporary form of political subjectivity emerged.

Tanyus Shahin was the Maronite muleteer born in poverty in Mount Lebanon and who became the peasant revolutionary that led the revolt in Mount Lebanon between 1858 and 1861. Initially, Shahin was instrumental in organising the peasants' resistance, which succeeded in evicting the Christian lords from the Christian village of Kisrawan and seized power through popular committees. After the popular success of the Kisrawan revolt, however, Tanyus and his comrades were invited to 'save' their Christian brethren in the mixed villages, where the Druze were lords and the Christian were the peasants. There, the conflict took an explicitly religious sectarian character. In fact, it is the moment where sectarianism is 'borne'. Whilst many historians understand this revolt, the violence and the sectarianism, as a class struggle derailed, Makdisi understands it as the moment of intersection and transformation between *ahali* agency and local and global processes:

> Shahin's rebellion, however, belonged to the modern world [. . .] It reflected the emergence of a new sectarian society in which, through a discourse of freedom, representation, and equality, Shahin and his rebels carved out a role for ordinary Maronite Christians in formal politics that anticipated the politics of nationalism. Shahin also deployed a discourse of freedom for Christians that was inherently limited and exclusionary, for it allowed no space for – indeed was premised against – the Druze and Shi'a inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. For him as for many others, the notion of sectarian rights went hand in hand with a notion of sectarian discrimination, just as the attempt to expand a Christian political sphere in Kisrawan from the outset included non-Christians.
>
> (Makdisi 2000b: 207)

Shahin was defeated militarily in 1861 by a combination of Maronite, Ottoman and French forces. He was shamed and made to publicly surrender but was never named in official Ottoman papers; instead he

was referred to as 'the leader of corruption and sedition' and cast into oblivion. The historical traces of Tanyus are lost after 1861.

The Kisrawan revolt that, after the 1860 violence became known as the Druze–Maronite massacre, was different to all previous revolts in a number of ways: (1) in scale, as it was much larger both geographically, as well as in terms of population; (2) it was led by a commoner, not a member of the nobility; and (3) it demanded not just better conditions but popular representation. Led by peasants against lords, the revolt challenged the status quo and the discourse that rendered knowledge and politics outside of the domain of the *ahali*. In a sense, villagers were able to re-appropriate the new forms of religious equality in order to challenge the institution of lordship. From the perspective of the Ottoman state, the Hatay Decree meant equality amongst elites not equality between notables and commoners, not equality *within* religious communities: 'Shahin's transgression was to conflate the equality between religious communities that was mandated by the Tanzimat with equality within religious communities' (Makdisi 2000b: 196).

It is here that political subjectivity completely ruptures and changes as the peasant *ahali* transforms from an object to a political subject. This transformation is very much one of people's power and agency: neither just Ottoman imposition, elite hegemony nor European domination but a revolutionary instance of creative – perhaps as much productive as destructive – popular agency. It is in this way that we may account for the emergence of sectarianism as a distinct kind of political subjectivity in the Levant. As popular demands for equality and representation were premised upon a vision of populist but exclusionary imagined religious communities, and as the monopoly of power-knowledge was violently broken away from the grasp of the *a'yan*, violence became governmentalised: it was no longer concentrated in the hands of the Sultan or the notable, it became dispersed anticipating its future dispersal and propagation through legal, economic and disciplinary apparatuses. In this way, elite monopoly over politics, power and knowledge was broken, and religious minorities along with sectarian political identities came to be.

Sectarianism and Nationalism Today

> Precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis [the bourgeoisie] anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service,

> borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.
>
> (Marx 1852)

The historical detour to late nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon, I hope, challenges the thesis that the praetorian basis of sectarian identification resides within pre-existing 'compact minorities' (Rabinovich 1979). From abject to subject, from *ahali* to *jumhur*, and from peasant to citizen, religion and specifically a populist, egalitarian vision of the sect textured Greater Syria's transition into new nation states. It was through the religious that the political field became available to the masses, that modern political subjectivity was articulated, and that broad participatory and representational politics became legitimate. Today in Lebanon, and increasingly throughout the volatile regions of Syria and Iraq, sectarianism (*ta'ifiyyah*) is an indication of a failed state and clashes rhetorically with nationalist narratives of coexistence (*ta'aysh*): 'sectarianism was not the failure or corruption of nationalism or the nation-state [. . .] it was Lebanese nationalism's specific precursor' (Makdisi 2000a: 166). However, both nationalism and sectarianism are historically closely related processes, and both are connected, indeed both are strategies of state reification towards what Abrams (2006: 122) calls the 'the legitimating of the illegitimate' – or what Mitchell (2006) calls the 'state-effect'. In Chapter 5, I trace the use of both nationalism and sectarianism in the cultural policies of the Ba'th regime. For the time, I would like to hint at the shared ground and mirror images across nationalism and sectarianism as by-products of modern era state formation:

> nationalisms are 'Janus-faced'. Like the ancient Roman deity, nationalisms bear two faces, one looking backward to the past, the other looking ahead to the future. On the one hand, nationalist movements represent themselves as heirs to an ancient and distinctive national history. In keeping with this principle, they reconstruct ('revive') ancient national glories, traditions, symbols, and myths. On the other hand, such movements simultaneously embrace Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment rationalism and

> its progressive and universalist pretensions, thereby situating themselves within the global modernist project.
>
> (Gelvin 1998: 11)

If nationalism is Janus-faced, then sectarianism may be one of its faces.

Chapter Synopsis

Our ethnographic journey begins in the Druze suburb of Jaramana, on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, Damascus. It traces the histories, genealogies and politics of two families, *bayt* Abud-Haddad and *bayt* Ouward, through their houses. Specifically, the chapter analyses the connections between the architecture and materiality of houses and the social idiom of *bayt* (house, family). By exploring the two families and the architecture of their houses, this chapter provides a detailed ethnographic account of historical change in modern Syria, internal diversity and stratification within the intimate social fabric of the Druze neighbourhood at a time of war, and contributes a relational approach to the anthropological understanding of houses.

Focused on cosmological beliefs and contemporary practices, Chapter 3 explores the centrality of the body and its constant transformations through the analysis of local reincarnation beliefs in the context of contemporary political and social struggles that permeate the Druze community. Specifically, the chapter explores the role of the body in Druze cosmology and ritual practice of death and birth. Through body rituals and transformations, this chapter shows that becoming a Druze is always a social process, negotiated and resisted through, amongst others, bodily practices. Locating the body as a site of struggle through practices, beliefs and rituals, this chapter offers novel contributions regarding Druze practices in Jaramana, and provides a dynamic, political understanding of relational processes and ritual intersubjectivity, whilst substantiating that the body is a site of struggle.

Chapter 4 focuses on the poetics and politics of Druze weddings in Jaramana in order to explore the relation between bodies and marriages, and specifically how bodies become socially appropriated during communal ceremonials. Alongside ethnographic descriptions of historical and present-day weddings, the chapter explores the nuptial

body in its political extensions and in its communal and societal relations. Discussing the poetics of the social construction of relational intimacies through nuptial rituals, the chapter argues against static notions of kinship and ritual, emphasising instead dynamic processes, power relations and performative transformations.

Chapter 5 moves from the local context of Jaramana to the national realm of the regime's cultural policies, and from the communal staging of weddings to the national stages of folklore festivals. This chapter is a combination of political theories of the state, the political economy of the Syrian state, and ethnographic analyses of how the Syrian state through its cultural policies, in which performances of marriage are centre-stage, attempts to command potentially threatening identifications through a spatial poetics of nuptial intimacy. Based on empirical research, this chapter argues against dominant applications of nation state theories, clearly demonstrating that the export of European-based formulations of nation state are not only ethnocentric but inappropriate within the Syrian context.

Chapter 6 extends the research focus through a selection of three ethnographic case studies from different Syrian locales, and from a specific age category, in order to show the different ways that young people relate, challenge and reinforce power. Specifically, youth responses to different forms of authority are examined: to external power and especially the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, the Syrian state, and the authority of parents and sectarian communities. By locating Syrian youth within contemporary struggles through ethnographic case studies, this chapter aims to sketch a nuanced, complex and colourful picture of the multifaceted ways that young people reinforce, resist and negotiate power relations in contemporary Syria. Through demonstrating the complex, multiple, and diverse ways the Syrian youths situate themselves within power relations, and form civil societies, this chapter aims to further the understanding of power relations in broader contexts than those of communities or the state.

Chapter 7 connects marriage politics and power relations in the community and the state to Syrian artists and middle-class intellectuals and globalised market forces. Specifically, combing art, everyday life and politics through a Syrian contemporary dance performance that is centred on the nuptial ritual, the chapter explores different powers and regimes of knowledge (sectarian, state, middle-class elites) that

constitute the Syrian body as their site of struggles. The dance performance is *Alf Mabrouk*, a revolutionary performance by Leish troupe – the first contemporary dance theatre troupe in Syria. The chapter brings together the three realms of local, national and global struggles on the nuptial body and demonstrates how intimate and violent struggles take place upon it.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 brings out the main empirical and theoretical contributions underlining how these are relevant to the present-day situation in Syria, and what the next day may bring.

A Note on Methodology: Relating and Writing

Impotentia judicandi literally means the incapacity to bring about a final decision during a judicial trial, and in reference to Levi's 'grey zone' (Levi 2004: 90), Agamben unpicks the two Latin words for witness: *terstis*, 'the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party'; and as *superstes*, the 'person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it' (Agamben 2004: 438). What the 'grey zone' does is to bring law and ethics face to face, to bring the witness–*terstis* and the witness–*superstes* to continually mirror their unresolved struggles. *Impotentia judicandi* may also describe a tension that is constitutive of anthropology (Moore 1999). Fieldwork and participant observation create witnesses–*superstes*. The act of writing imposes the status of witness–*terstis*, to resume an 'ethical' distance and to offer testimonies as a third party. But the impossibility of witnessing does not go away by conflating law and ethics. Anthropology is an epistemological science, and as such it continually conflates the different meanings of witnessing. In this section, I outline some of the more formal aspects of my fieldwork in Syria, such as relations with persons, communities and the host government. Specific methodological reflections are explored in each of the chapters that follow.

I conducted long-term (14-month) fieldwork, based primarily on the method of participant observation in the Druze community of Jaramana. Fieldwork was also multi-sited (Marcus 1995): I travelled outside of Jaramana to meet interviewees, as well as to directly observe folklore festivals, dance performances and dancers, and I spent a total of two months living with a Sunni Muslim family in Raqqa town. Fieldwork

and participant observation entail ethical choices, responsibilities and dilemmas that the researcher has to take in order to ensure the well-being, safety and consent of her participants (ASA guidelines); these dilemmas become all the more astute when one conducts fieldwork in an authoritarian state with a strong secret security apparatus. Being intrinsically connected to a specific community and persons, meant that I could not follow certain research interests (such as the topic of direct resistance) at certain times. Vigilance, heightened protection and the feeling of arbitrariness of security tactics, however, helped me to embody some of the aspects of living in Syria and to bring me closer to my research participants.

Fieldwork in Jaramana involved a long, slow process of acquaintance, gaining access, building trust, establishing rapport and negotiating informed consent; this was established by participant observation and the daily negotiations with the host families.[4] Yet, the single-most important informed consent negotiated and access granted occurred when my host parents would talk to other members of the community on *behalf* of me, explaining what anthropology, and my research was about. This marked not only that they knew and had 'tested' me sufficiently, but also that they *shared* the responsibility of representing me to, as well as protecting me from others.

Whilst most of the officials and dancers I interviewed did not want to be anonymous, research in Jaramana was predicated on the principles of trust, privacy and anonymity. All names and personal information that can be identified have been anonymised and changed, whilst certain information has also been altered in order to avoid recognition of any individual. The process of anonymisation, as well as including certain 'sensitive' subjects, events and relationships has been carried out together with research participants, especially from the two Druze families, *bayt* Abud-Haddad and *bayt* Ouward, as well as Noura Murad, the artistic director and founder of Leish Troupe. This book partly represents the social nature of fieldwork and writing, the continued involvement of research participants, and the social, engaged potential of anthropology.

Palestine and Christmas

Orientalism is described by Said (1978) as a set of discursive practices that classify and order the world according to relations of power, methods and techniques of unequal divisions into Occident and Orient,

in which one resembles the dominating and the other the dominated.[5] Savigliano expands on notions of Orientalism and colonisation to refer to the hegemonic processes of internal colonisation;[6] specifically she develops the concept of 'autoexoticism' in reference to her study of the history and politics of, the local and inseparably global, Argentinean tango. Autoexoticism refers to those local 'indigenous' practices of 'looking for identity through the Western mirror' (Savigliano 1995: 179). Yet, 'everyone has had one's own Orient, pertaining to space and time, most often of both' (Todorova 1997: 12), but sometimes this Orientalist frame shifts from 'a discourse about imputed opposition . . . [to one of] imputed ambiguity,' (Todorova 1997: 17), as in the discourses of Balkanism and within the contours of a European Orientalism that turns exotic others to stigmatised brothers (see Buchowski 2006). Many strands, local and global, most often contradictory, of Orientalism and autoexoticism exist in Greece, my home country, and yet I identify with Karayanni when he describes listening to Arabic radio stations:

> an indulgence in the foreign and exotic culture that was quite close geographically and yet far away, forcefully distanced by political ideologies. While I envisioned the moves, my ears drunk in the melodies and the *maqāms*, or musical roads, which were as familiar to my sensibility as the family features that you recognise in a close relative with whom you are not on speaking terms because of family feuds.
>
> (Karayanni 2010: 7–8)

From the perspective of Greek geography, 'our' near East was a place as close as to become palpable, familiar and threatening, as sufficiently far away as to remain exotic, and to act as a negative foil. I am not going to talk about Greek nationalism and Orientalism, others have done so in a much more lucid and textured way (Karayanni 2010: 121–57; Herzfeld 2005), I just want to point out that I grew up under a rigid, homogenising but always under threat nationalism, perpetrated in the school and by the media. But, at the same time I grew up in the unconventional household of a single mother and of a revolutionary trade unionist. In my home, European identity politics were a bourgeois concern, a manoeuvre to manipulate the public away from their everyday

exploitation. I remember the Christmas day when I got my first book presents: one was the illustrated poem by Odysseas Elytis, 'I Podilatissa' ('She, the bicycle rider', my translation), the other was a collection of drawings and poems of the Intifada by Palestinian children. Up until now, I cannot mentally dissociate one image from the other.

Tall, Blonde, with Blue Eyes

Many months after I had been living in Jaramana, Karem and his best friend, Salih, shared with me a funny story regarding the first time we all met. The story goes like this: Karem's sister, Zahra, had informed her brother that he will receive a call from a Greek friend of hers who was going to do research in Syria, and who might need help and friends. During my first visit to Syria in June 2008, I called Karem and arranged to meet him outside the hotel in which I was staying. Karem came with his best friend Salih, and on their way to meet me they engaged in wishful thinking: 'Oh, she's European [. . .] Different from Syrian girls [. . .] Imagine, she's going to be tall, blonde, and with blue eyes, fair skin.' The conversation continued (and I wish I could print the expressive gestures my two friends made) until they saw me: Short, with dark skin and eyes, and short, curly hair. 'We thought that you might be Salih's sister [Salih is of similar hair, height and skin tone] but you certainly were not European!'

Anthropologists are often and rightly perhaps critiqued for Orientalising their subjects, yet we have no monopoly over the possession of stereotypes. Anthropologists and research participants are just as much culprits as they are saints; probably Karem, Salih and I are located in the fuzzy middle. What fieldwork makes us do is to share our funny stories – and to create new ones.

The fact that I was not Druze, not Syrian, not Arab, not quite European but Greek had significant (and at times surprising) repercussions for conducting research in Jaramana and in Syria. Not only were the entry visa fees for Greek citizens significantly less than most other European countries, but because I could not be directly placed within the immediate known webs of knowledge and networks of familiarity and difference, because I was not perceived to be enmeshed in the familiar (stereotypical) fabric of the Middle East, nor as a threatening, imposing or completely ignorant outsider (a European, an American, an Orientalist), I was often given the benefit

of doubt. Being Greek was an important and favourable aspect of my social construction in Jaramana, because ancient Greek philosophy is considered one of the spiritual ancestors of *tawḥīd* and hence it was said that we are kinship relatives.[7]

Furthermore, my gender, my sexual unavailability (the fact that I was engaged to an English partner whom my families and friends met, and the social prescriptions of Druze endogamy), and the close caring relationships I developed with my two Druze mothers, situated me in an ambiguous but less problematic niche from other possible categories. Also, as I was 'adopted' by two *bayt*s that occupied different yet very respectable positions within the social rubric of Jaramana, this allowed me not only to move between their two social milieus but also to have a more general ease of movement at large within the Druze community of Jaramana. Should my positionality have been different, other opportunities and problems would have arisen:

> Maria: Umm Nidal, how would you say that people here view me?
> Umm Nidal: Oh, everybody likes you, Maria is like Fairouz [famous Lebanese singer] . . . You are very kind and polite (*m'rweh*), smart, strong . . .
> M: And how would you say they'd view me if I was the same person, with the same studies, family situation, but instead of Greek I was from here?
> UN: [Long, emotional pause] You know the answer to this. [Long pause] The society here . . . they would not see you with the same eyes.
> M: And you, how would you see me, Umm Nidal?
> UN: I am part of my society.

If I was not Greek, then I would be in the situation of Umm Nidal's daughter, Zahra . . . This conversation took place in July 2009, during a long discussion that had to do with Zahra living in Europe (this conversation is analysed further in Chapter 4).

Doing ethnography is a reaching towards the possibility of becomings, it is not only learning of each Other, not only learning from each other, but engaging in the unstable relational process of opening up possibilities of otherness, and sameness, possibilities of a 'tenuous and ephemeral' game: 'as I reach toward, I reach not toward

the "you" I ascertain but toward the "you" you will become in relation to our exchange' (Manning 2007: 7). In different degrees, our gestures involve us in a common becoming. Yet becoming, a touch, the reaching forward, entail possibilities; these include coming together as well as coming apart. Breakthrough and violence here, presuppose the touch. Let us begin.

CHAPTER 2

SECT AND HOUSE

Of Sects and Houses

'Now the days of happiness are over. I wish we could go back, we used to be happy. Do you remember when you were here?' said Umm Samir, who adopted me as her 'daughter' during my fieldwork in Syria, on the phone on July 2012. Despite her hard life, her ten children and fifteen grandchildren, I had never before heard Umm Samir's voice cracking with pain, heavy with sadness.[1] Her two youngest sons in the military, her country bathed in blood: 'Jaramana sends its sons to the army and receives back their coffins,' said my other Syrian 'mother', Najwa. The coming year would be worse for Syria as for both their families, *bayt* Abud-Haddad and *bayt* Ouward, respectively. Umm Samir's son was abducted for 51 days by armed militia, Najwa's husband was arrested for four days by the police; both families count relative deaths from the conflict. Jaramana, the Druze suburb of Damascus, where they live, has become a refugee camp hosting some of the estimated total of 5 million internally displaced, a battleground between government and opposition forces, and as friends inform me, a large real estate construction site. All these are the ingredients that form the political economy of war, an economy that crudely and profitably trades in regional and international markets: human loss, displacement, weapons, and the economic or para-economic development. And this is despite the fact that Jaramana is not nearly as badly affected as some other areas in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs or Raqqa.

The shifting contours of international friendships and enmities are transforming the resolution of the Syrian war from a near-impossibility to a second Somalia. The 'axes of evil' have reincarnated and reformed into sectarian battles of religious fundamentalism mixed with freedom, democracy and human rights. These concepts are not contradictory terms: neither sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, freedom, democracy nor human rights emerge together by historical circumstance or chance. As Makdisi reminds us, sectarianism *is* the modern story: '[neither] simply or exclusively a native malignancy [n]or a foreign conspiracy' (2000a: 3). Similarly, Mahmood (2012) traces the association of religious minorities to human rights discourses early in the Ottoman Empire as a European strategy of fragmenting and contesting Ottoman authorities through the construction of Christian religious protectorates within its borders. Outside of Middle Eastern geographies, Appadurai (1998) shows how the macabre poetics and politics of majorities versus minorities are not the civilisational fossils of bygone eras but the intimately spelled, structural foundations of the modern phenomenon of the nation state. Following such a line of enquiry, this chapter, concerned with the Druze community in Jaramana, Syria, takes sectarianism (*ta'ifiyyah*), as both a dangerous reality as well as a historically and socially constructed phenomenon. Where minorities in Syria are violently lacerated and distributed as war trophies, it is important to question the homogeneity and historicity of such formations. In this direction, the first aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Druze of Jaramana are not homogenous in their beliefs and actions, and that they have never in fact been.

Four kilometres south-east of Damascus and with approximately 200,000 inhabitants, Jaramana had, before the current violence, one of the highest population densities in Syria: 15,000 inhabitants per km^2 (Al-Miqdad 2008).[2] Historically a Druze village, the social fabric of contemporary Jaramana threads together a majority Druze population, with Syrian Christians and Muslims, and Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. The Druze, who occupy the central position in the town both politically and spatially, are a religious sect that emerged during the Fatimid Dynasty in eleventh-century Cairo, and whose contemporary communities primarily reside in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan. The Druze religion is based on the doctrine of[3] *tawḥīd*: translated as Unitarianism or Monism, it advocates strict and esoteric monotheism

(Makarem 1979). It shares a historical relationship with Islam, especially the Ismaili branch of Shi'i Islam from which it emerged, and it incorporates strands of Sufi, Neoplatonic, Persian and Hindu thought (Betts 1988). A distinctive characteristic of the faith is its non-proselytism: Druze are born Druze, they cannot 'become' Druze (Khuri 2004). This aspect of the faith is theologically reinforced through a belief in human-to-human reincarnation (*taqamuṣ*), in which Druze souls only inhabit Druze bodies (Makarem 1979). Moreover, Druze endogamy is strictly practised and prescribes that all members of the religious community, irrespectively of gender, be married exclusively within the Druze community. When a member marries 'out' they, and possibly their family, become ostracised from the community (Alamuddin and Starr 1980; Kastrinou Theodoropoulou 2012; Layish 1982). However, Druze communities are not as homogeneous or internally united as imagined (Joumblatt 1982).

The chapter explores the histories, politics and houses of two Druze families that live in Jaramana and occupy very different positions and networks within the community. *Bayt* Abud-Haddad is considered *ahl al-Jaramana* (natives of Jaramana), and it is one of the oldest and religiously significant families of Jaramana, a family that has been providing religious *shaykh*s and *'uqqāl* (religious initiates). The family lives in a traditional Arabic courtyard house; the male adults work in manual occupations. Only one of the family's ten offspring have gone to university. In contrast, the family of *bayt* Ouward, who are relative newcomers to Jaramana, all have university degrees. They are secular and socialise in political, intellectual circles; they are considered *mouthaqafin* (intellectuals). The family lives in a modern apartment overlooking the busiest street in Jaramana; its members have worked in schools and universities and the family owns a shop. Whilst their houses are less than a five-minutes' walk apart, their social cycles, networks and also their perceptions and practices are different and contested, providing evidence for internal stratification, such as differences in status and class, within the Druze sect.

The second aim of this chapter is an analytical concern with *bayt*, meaning house, household, and family in Arabic. The Arabic term *bayt* combines diverse meanings and social variations for the built material house, kinship terminology of family, minimal and also maximal lineage (Chatty 1974: 101). Precisely because *bayt* is both pervasively used and

because it is fluid, it is useful to work with: everybody in Syria has a *bayt* but precisely what that means, who it includes and excludes, varies greatly depending on circumstance and time. Therefore, I use the term *bayt* in this flexible idiomatic way, to denote the minimal lineage of households in Jaramana, and also the maximal lineage. Additionally, I use it to denote the material, structural dimension of a house building. This definitional fluidity underscores that houses or *bayt*s, whether in terms of kinship or material architecture, are not 'things' but 'things of relations'. As relations, they exhibit a past, present and future, and as things they are material. It is this changing materiality of relations that this chapter is about.

Specifically, I ask: what may the social life of a house tell us? How do the social, material and historical traces of families and genealogies transform in time and space? What does architecture tell us about people and how social organisation affects the material forms of their houses? In order to explore these questions I take the house as a living dynamic process (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Waterson 1990), rather than a structuralist model of social organisation (Lévi-Strauss 1982, 1987). However, I do not wish to relegate architecture into a mere function of ideology, a communicator of external, stable signifiers, but to trace the house itself as a *relationship* (Bourdieu 2005 [1990]; Mitchell 1990: 50). Besides, from Engels (2007 [1882]) to Miller (2005), it has been demonstrated that people, environment and things are dialectically related and mutually constructed. However, as Vellinga (2007: 756) points out, the anthropological study of the 'house' has often rigidly distinguished between the house as a form of architecture with its symbolic significance in the cosmos, and the house as a social category for cultural systems relating to kinship. Instead, he argues, the house must be studied as both architecture and social organisation, specifically how 'architectural processes relate to social and symbolic ones, to see how the construction of materiality of the house as a work of architecture relates to the construction of social groups (whether identified as "Houses" or not) and vice versa' (Vellinga 2007: 760). Hence, this chapter analyses the material structure of the built house side-by-side with the genealogical memories and kinship organisation: the house design, the stories, the conflicts, the social, political and economic transformations in the country and in the families are traced. I show how *bayt*, in Syria and in the wider region (see Bahloul 1996; Delaney 1991;

Geertz *et al.* 1979; Oppenheimer 1980), is practically inseparable from its material and immaterial aspects of belonging, and is an important local idiom which structures relationships and their political contestations (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Pine 1996; González-Ruibal 2006; Yeoh 2006; Tamari 1981).

However, in order to underscore the materiality of social organisation and family relations, and to show how these relate to material changes in the house and the political economy of Syria over the past decades, the chapter is divided into three historical sections: pasts, presents and futures. In the first section, I outline the social, political and economic changes that have taken place in Syria since the beginning of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on Jaramana and the Druze *bayt* of Abud-Haddad, showing how houses change according to broad social and economic transformations, but that the ways they change, are neither uniform nor politically uncontested. In 'presents', I provide a view of Jaramana from the ethnographic present of my fieldwork: neoliberal development, gentrification, and the conflicts within the middle-class *bayt* of Ouward as these become apparent through memories of the house and family dwelling and narrated in specific rooms. Following Telle (2007: 196), I hope that this biographical approach brings out vividly the multiple relations between peoples and things, time and space. In this way, I built on the connection between materiality and historicality, defined as the 'past of objects and persons' (Hirsch and Stewart 2005: 262), the 'on-going social production of accounts of pasts and futures' (Ibid.) through a composite account of the economic, social, political and material transformations of *bayt* through recourse to architecture, history, memories and stories. The last section, 'futures', concludes with some brief reflections that combine the findings with the present moment of war.

Pasts: Historical Formation and Transformation

Since the end of the French Mandate, populist political coalitions alongside rural movements and socialist or state-capitalist redistribution of wealth have led the establishment of new elites through 'revolution from above' (Hinnebusch 2001) – an abrupt reversal of the political order through the Ba'th Party's rise to power and the consolidation of the Assad regime (Khalaf 1981; Khoury 1991b; Van Dam 2011; Perthes

2001). Our houses and households in Jaramana are emplaced within this context of historical changes, and this section aims to outline the particular configurations, underlying that spaces and houses embody social, political and economic relations of production and reproduction.

History, Politics and Agrarian Reform in the Twentieth Century

Contemporary Syria emerged from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab Revolt and the subsequent colonisation of the Arab world by European powers. Immediately after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, a Greater Syria included parts of Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Palestine and Jordan came under the British Mandate, whereas Syria fell under French Mandate. The French implemented 'divide and rule' over Syria, creating territorial identifications based on sectarian lines that they reinforced as political and geographic entities (Neep 2012). Mandate Syria was divided in four states: Aleppo, Damascus, Lattakia and the Druze mountain. The Syrian national struggle for independence was heroic and long; it began as a local revolt in the Druze area and soon became a full-blown national revolt (1925–7), led by the Druze Pasha Sultan Al-Atrash (Provence 2006). Syrian Independence was formally implemented on 17 April 1946.

The years between Syrian Independence and union with Nasser's Egypt (as United Arab Republic, 1958–61) offer a peculiar matrix for the establishment of democratic institutions and freedoms along with the political instability of successive military coups and the 'struggle for Syria' (Seale 1986) between rival regional powers, Iraq and Egypt specifically. This period is also one of economic growth, especially for landowning elites (Khalaf 1981), since economic and social changes brought about through a market of free enterprise resulted in the concentration of wealth and power. In a country whose population majority were disadvantaged peasants, this accumulation of wealth exaggerated structural inequalities and fuelled broad popular discontent (Batatu 1999; Khalaf 1981, 1991; Hinnebusch 1990, 1991). During this time, progressive movements took root, especially in the countryside (Batatu 1999) challenging the power monopoly of notables – a term for local elites that underscores elite continuation from the Ottoman to the nation state era (Khoury 1991a). During the same period, the Arab–Israeli conflict began in 1948, engaging and, to some extent, humiliating the newly formed Arab states, as well as introducing an influx of Palestinian refugees throughout the

Arab Middle East. The rise of nationalism(s), the unstable political climate, and the growing economic inequalities (Khalaf 1981), favoured the foundation of the Arab Resurrection (Baʿth) Party in Damascus by young nationalist intellectuals (Galvani 1974: 5; Kaylani 1972). The Baʿth (Arab Socialist Resurrection Party) was established by intellectuals Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar in 1947, and it combined socialism with ideals of Arab nationalism and pan-Arab unity (as in its slogan *waḥda, ḥurriyya, ishtirakiyya*: unity, freedom, socialism). Populist rather than strictly ideological (Hinnebusch 1990, 1991), Baʿth's support base was amongst traditionally disadvantaged minorities (such as the Alawi) and army officers, such as Akram Hourani (Galvani 1974: 5). The army, minorities and the rural base were all interconnected and instrumental in Baʿth's rise to power (see Batatu 1999; Khoury 1991b; Hinnebusch 1991).

In the years of the United Arab Republic (UAR, 1958–61) (Cleveland 2004: 314), a Military Committee was formed in Egypt by ambitious nationalist Syrian officers. This committee was able to organise itself and gain power within the Syrian Army in the years following the dissolution of UAR, and on 8 March 1963 carried out a successful coup in Damascus. As the military lacked the popular base and political organisation, it invited the Baʿth Party to govern.

From 1963 to 1966, the political leaders of Baʿth dominated the stage of Syria. In this period, internal antagonisms were consolidated between two factions of the party: the 'old cadres', such as al-Bitar, whose ideological basis was Arab socialism and whose policy was based on gradual change; and the more radical Marxist faction, led by al-Shufi and members of the military committee such as Salah Jadid and Yusuf Zu'ayyin (Khalaf 1981). On 3 February 1966, a counter-coup was successfully led by the latter (Galvani 1974: 8). In the period 1966–70, known as the Neo-Baʿth, the new leadership, although politically organised on a narrow basis, was able to implement radical socialist policies. It was also able to build up wider mobilization through *munazzamat sha'biyya* (popular organisations) (Khalaf 1981: 168; Galvani 1974: 10–12), such as the General Federation of Peasants (GFP) and the General Federation of Labour Unions (GFLU).

The radical policies of the Neo-Baʿth and the Arab defeat of 1967 had a direct effect on the regime, as it was losing popular legitimisation and support. The political, economic and social problems were epitomised by Hafez al-Assad's seizure of power on 13 November 1970, in *al-ḥaraqa*

al-taṣḥīḥiyya (the corrective movement). Seeking to re-establish the authority of his regime by gaining broader social support, Assad's policy from the 1970s until his death in 2000, had sought to deal with the twofold problems of: (a) regional and international foreign relations since 1967, including the peace negotiations for the return of the occupied territories of the Golan Heights and the settling of Israel–Palestine conflict (Hinnebusch 1996; Perthes 2001; Seale 2000); and (b) economic policies such as *al-infitāḥ 'ala al-sha'ab* (opening to the people) and *al-infirāj* (relaxation and/or politico-economic liberalisation) (Khalaf 1981: 181). As Patrick Seale (1989) has argued, Hafez al-Assad was able to transform Syria from a playground over which other powers fought into a major regional player. At the same time, a nationalist foreign policy and the development of state capitalism helped strike a precarious balance between the regime, the private sector and the changing dynamics of the region and world (Haddad 2012; Rabo 2005).

Agrarian Change, Industrial Development and Urbanisation

Syria has been radically transforming since the 1970s, in terms of social structure of its agrarian and nomadic communities (Chatty 1986), its industrial development (Rabo 2005), and the drift of population from rural to urban centres in search of waged labour. In its struggle for legitimation and power consolidation, the Ba'th regime implemented 'socialist' policies such as land reform and redistribution (Hinnebusch 1991: 37) which greatly affected the rural social and economic structures (Khalaf 1981, 1991). Through these policies, the Ba'th party was able to mobilize nationalist-populist ideologies of the time (such as Arab Nationalism and Socialism) in its recruitment of 'rural intelligentsia' (Hinnebusch 1991: 32), and to provide the basis of popular/mass support from rural peasantry. The demolition of latifundist capitalism (Hinnebusch 1991: 37) resulted in the political and economic disempowerment of the historically elite group in Syria: the urban notables, whilst allowing previously disenfranchised groups, such as rural peasantry and minorities, to ascend to power (Khoury 1991a: 27). Khalaf's ethnography of a rural village, Hawi al-Hawa, in al-Raqqa, Northern Syria, captures the dynamics of change and their dialectic relationship between socio-economic transformations. The anthropologist combines a multiplicity of resources and observations (history, archival research, participant observation, interviews, letters, primary

and secondary evidence) into a fractal picture of a changing village through a detailed study of the historical processes of change: from the 'old order' (Khalaf 1981: 45) of tribal solidarity, to the 1950s entrepreneurial capitalism, to socialist reforms, 'corrections' and transformations up until 1980. The debate of tradition versus modernity is recast by describing and explaining the social and economic transformations from Bedouin tribal leaders to the 'cotton *shaykh*s' to the infrastructural socialist changes of Ba'th in the 1960s, the peasants and their new forms of empowerment (and arguably different kinds of domination) through Unions and greater access to both means of production and education, the author shows how certain traditional values and systems of practices are maintained and yet:

> how the dynamics of 'tradition' operate within the broader context of modernizing change; they show how people in their labour to advance their interests within a modernizing context creatively utilize the framework of traditional cultural forms to negate the very traditionalism which is normally associated with such terms.
> (Khalaf 1981: 563)

Through the modern appropriation of tradition and the metaphor of the *mukhadram* (cultural collagist), Khalaf sketches the contingency of an impressive flexibility to shifting social and economic contexts of his characters, uncovering the rationality of the seeming 'bundles of contradictions' (Khalaf 1981: 523). From 'camel to truck', to borrow the title from Chatty's work on rural transformation which transverses a similar terrain to Khalaf's, political, economic and technological developments in Syria greatly affected the lives and hierarchies, particularly for the rural populations. Along with land redistribution and agrarian change, the development of industry, with its new demands for labour force initiated a trend of internal migration to urban centres, and changes to the political economy of Damascus' peripheries to which we turn now.

Jaramana

There are only two studies focusing on Jaramana, one published in Arabic by Jaramana Council (2000), and an online publication concerned with Iraqi refugees and urban planning in Jaramana by

Fahmi and Jaeger (2009). Jaramana Council states that Jaramana is as old and as continually inhabited as Damascus, but does not provide specific historical references as to when the village was established as Druze. Fahmi and Jaeger (2009: 21) on the other hand, do not provide a date but estimate the development of Jaramana as a Druze village in the late nineteenth century. Historical resources complicate matters further since mention of Jaramana occurs only in passing, as a Druze agricultural village in the vicinity of Damascus' agricultural provinces, the fertile plains of Ghuta (Abu Chakra 2006: 175; Batatu 1999: 14; Betts 1988). However, Druze villages surrounding Damascus have existed since the start of the Druze Call (*da'wa*) in the eleventh century. Firro (1992: 34) puts the Ghuta area within the first five oldest Druze settlements, but he mentions that the village of Jaramana was established after 1860.

Informants in Jaramana supported the view of the Council (2000) regarding Jaramana's ancient past, arguing for the Aramaic roots of their village (providing as evidence that Jaramana in Aramaic means 'brave men'), and that the Druze had settled in the village since the start of the *da'wa*. However, based on family genealogies and oral histories collected during fieldwork, most of Jaramana's inhabitants lived in the village at the turn of the nineteenth century, whilst some of the oldest families in Jaramana, those considered *ahl al-Jaramana* (natives of Jaramana, such as *bayt* Abud-Haddad) can trace their genealogies and residence in Jaramana up to 200 years ago. Land distribution and current ownership in Jaramana is predominantly Druze, which explains the relative wealth of the Druze population vis-à-vis their neighbours or recent new comers. Although more research is necessary, for the purposes of this work it is safe to assume that whilst Druze settlements around Damascus date amongst the first of the religious community, Jaramana must have become a distinct Druze village some 150–200 years ago.

Although Batatu classes the peasants of al-Ghouta as 'pacific' or of 'peaceful deposition'; (in contrast to 'peasants of warrior origin' such as the cultivators in the Euphrates valley), he also stresses that 'the fiercest [. . .] and the most difficult to harness politically are the peasants of the mountain, notably the montane Alawis and the Druze' (Batatu 1999: 12). Hinnebusch traces the transformation of the Ghouta plains from fertile agricultural gardens through industrial development to absorption into the Damascene suburbs during the Ba'thist era (1990: 247–9).

Before the current war, it was estimated that half of Jaramana's residents were Iraqi refugees (Hoshan 2009; Harding 2009). Because of this swift change in population, Jaramana had been portrayed as the 'refugee city' (UNRWA 2010). Whilst there was an overwhelming Iraqi presence in certain parts of Jaramana, there were others, such as the historical centre, that are inhabited almost exclusively by members of the Druze community. Both *bayt* Ouward and *bayt* Abud-Haddad live within the vicinity of the historical centre of Jaramana, and the physical as much as the social worlds that these two families exhibit, do not map neatly onto Jaramana's other inhabitants. In most cases, the Druze community occupies different spatial and social milieus from Jaramana's Christians, Muslims, Iraqis and Palestinians. Due to the high proportion of Druze land ownership in Jaramana and the development of real estate opportunities, the community in Jaramana have largely benefited from the economic policies of Hafez al-Assad. The neoliberal policies of Bashar al-Assad did not considerably affect the wealth accumulation of this community which was greatly fostered during the same time by the increased housing demand from Iraqi immigrants. Although interaction between the Druze inhabitants and 'others' existed during fieldwork, it was rather limited whilst physical and social spaces were segregated (Fahmi and Jaeger 2009).

Material Houses and the Materiality of Social Relations: The House of bayt *Abud-Haddad*

Together with the changes in economic relations of production, the shift from agriculture to industry to services, and the rise in population, Jaramana at the time of fieldwork had already transformed from a village to one of the capital's bustling suburbs. The material and functional aspects of houses had similarly shifted from village houses (a rectangular formation of two or more adjacent rooms with an open courtyard) to tall contemporary apartment buildings. And yet, the patterns of the social structure and social existence of the house, such as verilocal residence and the functionality of rooms, had been adapted rather than being completely transformed: whole apartment blocks were usually owned by a single family that would be likely to accommodate verilocal marriage patterns within the same building.

Similarly, whilst construction materials had shifted from wood, clay and mud to concrete, many of the social idioms that informed the forms

and functions of the house remained. Specifically, hospitality and the reception of guests, continued to be practices of daily activity holding significant social, political and economic value, important ways of relating and belonging (see Sweet 1974). The architecture of the houses embodies this relational social practice in a way that, as Piot observes for Kabre houses: it is not the 'real' practices that derive from an 'ideal' model but rather the 'ideal' which derives from reality (Piot 1999: 127). In this way, the guesthouse (called *maḍāfa*, *qa'a* or *mijlis*) used to be the biggest room, or even a separate house where: 'under its arches coffee beans were roasted and pounded, clients earned and symbolic capital accumulated' (Khalaf 1981: 128). Druze, and generally Syrian houses today, continue to maintain this form, as Khuri (2004: 142) notes that 'in Jabal al-'Arab today, the first room to be built and furnished in a new house is the *maḍāfa*, and the primary supplies are coffee and coffee pots'. In the modern apartments of Jaramana, most rooms are still not functionally distinct (cf. Mitchell 1991; Weber 2009), most rooms are dedicated to the reception of guests, whilst the sleeping arrangements of the household members shift often and may not coincide with a specific room for sleep.

The definition of spatial boundaries varies historically and depends on the perceived social proximity or closeness of interpersonal relations (Eickelman 1977; Rugh 1997; Weber 2009). One aspect of the construction, continuity and change of spatial boundaries is concerned with the gendered spaces of the Arab house (cf. Weber 2009: 232). Associated with the feminine, the cold and the separable, *bayt al-sheta* (lit. house of the winter) was where the gendered activities of food preparation, cooking, family eating, socialising, and birth took place, as well as where the women and children slept. This 'heart of the hearth' that was the warmest part of the house, the 'house of winter' can both literally as well as figuratively be conceptualised as a 'house' on its own, as in its name, a stand-alone entity. Today, whilst *bayt al-sheta* has been replaced by modern kitchens, appliances and heating alternatives, the activities associated with it, that is, the gendered division of labour in production and reproduction of the household, have been maintained in *bayt* Abud-Haddad where none of its female members works outside of their house.

The patterns of social structure, forms and functions of space, and the reproduction of gendered relations, are interrelated dialectically to

changes in the social, political and economic realms of Jaramana and Syria. Architecture changes along with social relations and social organisation such as the shift from agriculture to industry to services; similarly, the materiality of the house changes along with the social contours of the everyday life of the social entity that inhabits it. This simultaneous shift in both architectural form and the social organisation of the *bayt* is best demonstrated in the case of *bayt* Abud-Haddad, where architecturally (from a village to a traditional Damascene house), economically (from lower economic status to relative wealth) and socially (from ordinary peasants to religious prominence) the house changes completely, along with the atypical matriarch, Nadira, who spearheads this change, and to whose story we turn next.

Bayt *Abud-Haddad: Material Houses and the Materiality of Social Relations*

Her portrait, lively eyes and plum cheeks framed by a white *foutah*, still dominated the formal reception room (*qa'a*) of the house, more than a decade after her death at the time of my stay at *bayt* Abud-Haddad. Nadira Latif was Ali's mother (Ali is the current head of the household, better known as Abu Samir, father of Samir). Nadira was the second wife of Hussein Haddad (see kinship diagram, Figure 2.1). Hussein had one son and four daughters from his first marriage, and when his first wife

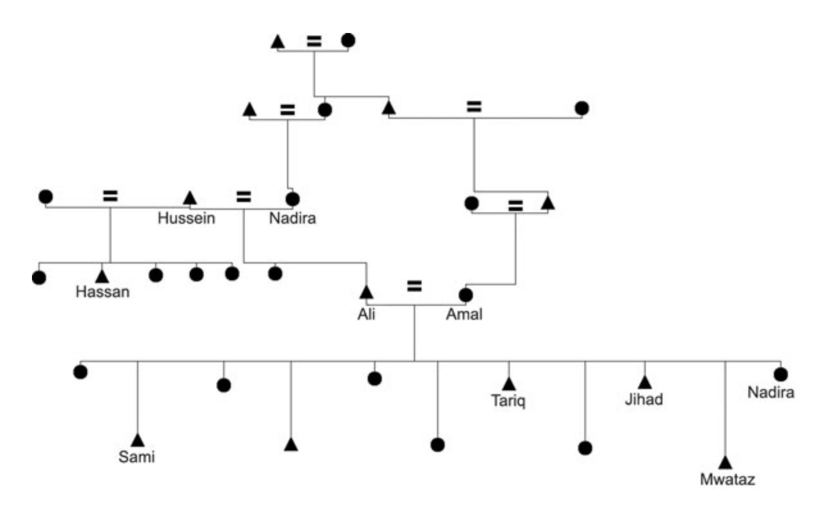


Figure 2.1 *Bayt* Abud-Haddad kinship diagram.

died, he married Nadira, who bore him a son and a daughter. Hussein died five years later, and Nadira, who never married again, looked after her children and Hussein's four daughters. Hassan, Hussein's eldest son, however, wanted to take as his own all of his father's inheritance. In Jaramana at the time, legal codes followed spatial proximity rather than religious doctrine. This meant that at instances of personal status, such as marriage or inheritance, the Druze inhabitants of Jaramana followed Shari'a law as was implemented in Damascus, rather than the Druze codes that were in place elsewhere in Suwayda and in Lebanon. Based on Shari'a law, the male siblings' share of the inheritance must be twice that of the female, whilst Druze religious code provides equal inheritance rights to all siblings irrespectively of gender (Layish 1982). Nadira, confident in her Druze legal rights, publicly challenged Hassan, shook religious advice, and finally took him to the religious court in Suwayda, where she obtained a favourable court order and was thus successful in protecting the rights of her children and also of Hussein's four other daughters. Hassan broke away from the family – still today there is no relation between the two brothers – Nadira nurtured all remaining six children until the daughters got married and left the house, and remained the loving and determined household matriarch during Ali's marriage with Amal (better known as Umm Samir), until her death.

Nadira's story of determination and struggle for justice, as a woman who challenged and won over a man, despite structural patriarchy, through Druze religion, has become as important as a foundational myth for *bayt* Abud-Haddad, whose members continue to talk, praise and reinvent Nadira. Here, I use 'foundational' intentionally to underline a structural change in the architecture of the house that was affected by Nadira: over the past century Abud-Haddad's house has gone through three distinct architectural phases (see Figure 2.2), the last two of which were instigated and supervised by Nadira, and perhaps embody much of the shifting and atypical organisation of the household.

Once married to Hussein, Nadira entered a house that had been built at the turn of the twentieth century. The house was a rectangular construction comprising four, square rooms adjacent to one another (in order from the bottom of Figure 2.3: *bayt al-sheta*, a kitchen/family room; *qa'a*, a reception/guest room; *iwan*, a north-facing, open reception room; and another *qa'a*). The house was not gated but 'open', readily accessible to the

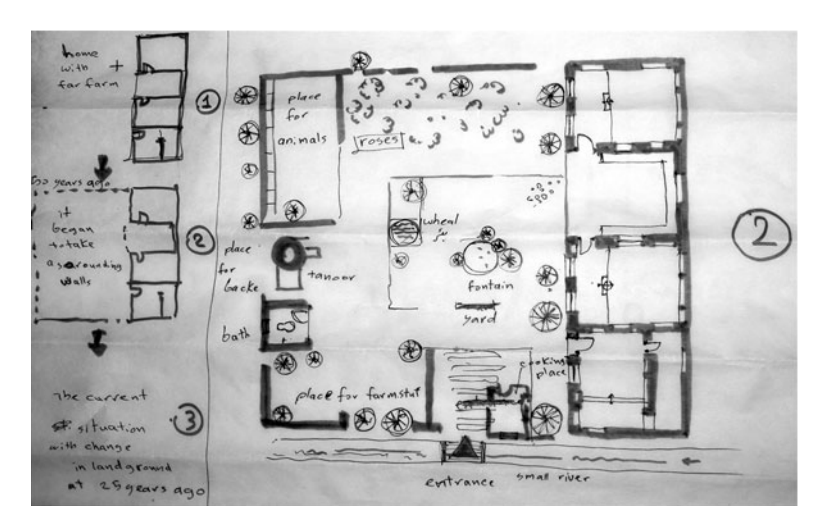


Figure 2.2 Drawing of the three phases in the development of *bayt* Abud-Haddad. Drawing by Tariq Abud-Haddad.

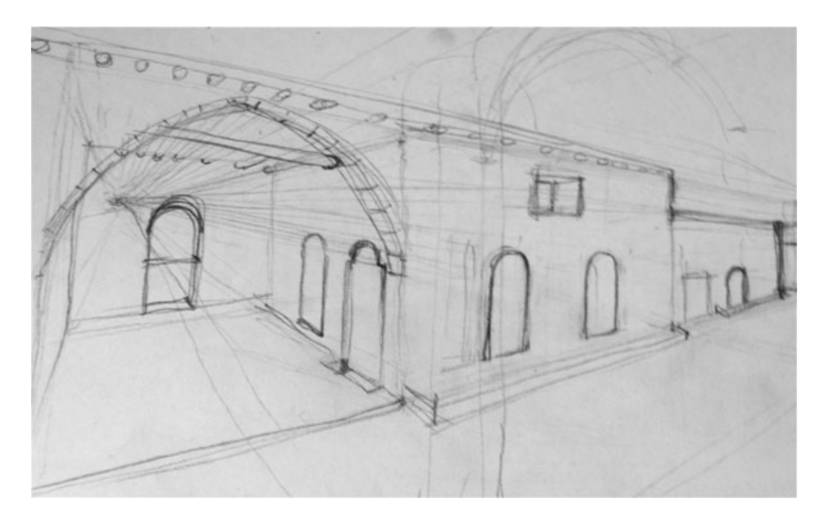


Figure 2.3 The house at the beginning of the twentieth century. Drawing by Tariq Abud-Haddad.

passer-by; such architecture is typical to what generally referred to as a ‘village house’ in Syria, as opposed to a traditional Damascene ‘city house’ which is gated (see Hourani 2005: 126; Tergeman 1994: xvi–xvii, 16, 31). Hussein’s main income came from waged agricultural labour.

After Hussein and Nadira's marriage, the exterior of the house was expanded to occupy a large courtyard garden in the front. Walls guarded the house and a distinct entry point, a gate, was built. Further changes reflected the necessities of the intensification of the agricultural livelihood of the family (also in Figure 2.2): a small irrigation canal ran across the southern side of the house; a water fountain occupied the centre of the courtyard. On the northern-most side, there was a flower garden of roses, geraniums, ferns, jasmine and a few orange and lemon trees. Nadira was able to maintain the economic survival of the family through small-scale farming and herding, concentrated around the household. This phase of the house lasted well into the 1970s, when Ali sold the family's plot of land in the south of Jaramana to finance his wedding and to buy a smaller farming plot on the eastern side of the village.

Talking of her entrance into *bayt* Abud-Haddad, Umm Samir, who had also lost her mother and married Abu Samir from love in 1971, used to exalt the qualities of the Arabic house, that with its numerous self-contained rooms surrounding an internal courtyard, provided adequate facilities for the accommodation of more than one nuclear family: 'Arabic houses were not made for just one family. But now, everyone wants to live in their own apartment.' Yet, only in the last and most recent architectural phase, did *bayt* Abud-Haddad become a traditional Arabic Damascene house (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5). Weber defines traditional Damascene houses as 'houses with various living rooms (*uda/umad*) [. . .] grouped around one or two more spacious courtyards,' noting that 'the house looks "inwards"' (Weber 2009: 231–2) because the windows of the house face the internal courtyard of the house, and since 'as a rule of Damascene architecture, representation takes place mainly in the interior parts of the house' (Weber 2009: 233).

During the last architectural phase, the structure of the oldest part of the house remained the same, but *bayt al-sheta* was no longer in use, and the second *qa'a* now functioned as a walk-in closet and storage for long-life foodstuff. Seven new rooms were added. Two large rooms stand where the flower garden used to be. The room on the left is used by the household offspring for sleeping and studying. The room on the right used to be the private room for their grandmother; it had remained empty since her death, in early 2000, but briefly accommodated the first-born son, Samir, when he got married, until his own apartment house

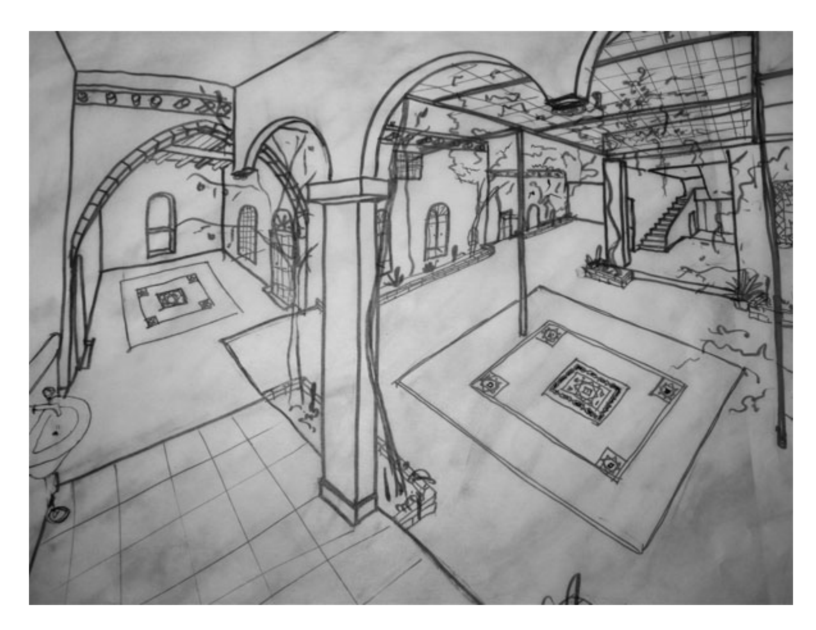


Figure 2.4 Inside the courtyard house of *bayt* Abud-Haddad. Drawing by Tariq Abud-Haddad.

was built on the family's farmland. This is also where the anthropologist was accommodated. In the central courtyard, where the fountain used to exist, a mosaic with a central Damascene geographic pattern is covering the earth. Pergolas with vines, planters with trees and flowers form the borders around the central courtyard. There are three salons that are used to entertain, in the following order for: casual, formal, and very high status visits; two of these rooms are used as family spaces accommodating everyday socialising, eating and sleeping.

The third phase of the house's alterations took place roughly over the span of two decades (1980–2000), coinciding with the birth of Umm and Abu Samir's children, the development of industry and trade in the expense of agriculture, population rise, the aftermath of the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Let us linger for a whilst on the (re)construction of the house in the traditional Damascene form at a time when construction of modern apartment buildings was common, and indeed when courtyard houses were rebuilt as apartment blocks (as in the case in *bayt* Ouward). Increasingly after the 1920s and 1930s the construction of courtyard houses dropped dramatically as such types of house no longer fulfilled

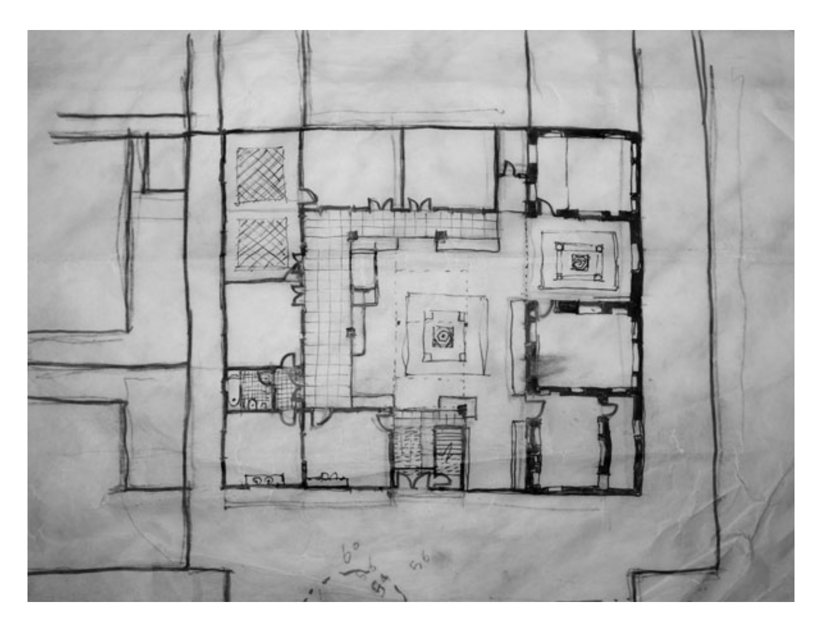


Figure 2.5 Ground plan of *bayt* Abud-Haddad. Drawing by Tariq Abud-Haddad.

'the criteria of class distinction' (Weber 2009: 395). So, what could explain such a seemingly against-the-tide decision of *bayt* Abud-Haddad? Why did they make a traditional house when all around them were constructing modern apartment buildings? Why did they build the house as a traditional Damascene, urban house – neither a traditional peasant nor a specifically Druze dwelling?

Whilst it is impossible, and even perhaps irrelevant, to know what the exact intentions of this course of action were, I will frame this decision in terms of its effects, accessed through the family's responses, participant observation and analysis. The decision to build a traditional Damascene house has had profound effects on the ways that the family is perceived internally in Jaramana, specifically in terms of reputation and status. First, the decision to go back, as it were, into something 'traditional' went against the prevailing style at the time, aiming to be 'modern' was associated with the emerging middle classes and the nouveaux riches (Watenpaugh 2006; Salamandra 2004). This decision underscores the family's strategy not only to be *ahl-al-Jaramana*, but to *show it* by inscribing its origin (*asil*) on the new-built traditional walls of the house.

Secondly, this decision lays a concrete claim in changing status – from landless peasants to *materially* becoming part of the traditional elite landscape. This claim to a higher status, crucially, was subtly made not by way of buying one's way up, or by adopting the latest trend, or through conspicuous consumption – the usual tools of middle-class or new elites (Salamandra 2004), but rather by going back and embodying in hindsight the 'traditional' values of household. This is achieved through the adoption of a traditional *urban* rather than rural or peasant design for the house. This decision offers historical material force to the aesthetics of the house that state that we have always been here (claiming tradition and authenticity), but we have never been poor (claiming a higher status). It also underscores another incident of Nadira's strategic use of identities: whilst she had used Druze religious identity to maintain the family's property against Hussein, she similarly used urban Damascene architecture to make a claim *in* the Druze community of elite urban status.

In this gradual development of *bayt* Abud-Haddad's status and reputation, the material structure of the house helped greatly: not only as a visual symbol, but mainly because the house, with its nice rooms and spacious courtyard lent itself to wedding celebrations and funeral rites, ceremonials that necessitate large number of visitors, not only for the family but for much of the surrounding neighbourhood. By the time I was conducting fieldwork, the house had become a representation for the 'traditional Druze Jaramana', where large gatherings, such as shaykhly meetings and celebrations of expatriates, took place. In this way, the family, like the house, have become indisputably part of the traditional, religious and social elites of Jaramana.

On a final level, building a traditional house of indistinct sectarian denomination may be understood as a subtle critique of modernisation and industrialisation of the state, a strategy shared with the old disenfranchised elites that developed a politics of resistance through claims to authenticity of an old Damascus (Salamandra 2004). Yet, at the same time, *bayt* Abud-Haddad provides a critical foil to these old 'notable' Damascene elites that demand the historical monopoly over authenticity, status and taste (also see Salamandra 2004; Shannon 2006), as their claim to a historical transcendental belonging to a traditional elite has been affected by the Ba'th policies of land redistribution through which Nadira and Abu Samir were able to own agricultural land.

Presents: Middle-Class Politics and a Family Conflict

By 2011 Jaramana was bearing the marks of gentrification: continuous development in real estate, emerging entertainment spaces and cultural hubs, and increasing residence by artists, intellectuals and students. At the same time, the Druze community was redefining its boundaries more actively and more publicly than ever before: building a grand temple, establishing entertainment halls specifically designated for religious celebrations, even the increasingly public visual display of Druze symbols on windows, cars and doors. The intimate, almost exclusive, social relationships between the Druze inhabitants of Jaramana were creating and reinforcing visual and spatial boundaries of Druzeness through economic accumulation and social networks, articulated in segregated neighbourhood clusters of new Druze immigrants, Christians from Damascus, and Iraqi refugees in the town's geography. Making place out of space, as Harvey (2009) notes, characterises human societies, and in Jaramana this interaction was a result of both social and economic pressures such as rural to urban migrations and immigrant economies due to the occupation and sectarian strife in Iraq. The emerging visibility and distinction of the Druze community also relates to a new kind of confidence, then, stemming from elite investment in the area in the context of neo-liberal state reforms, middle-class consumption combined with 'identity' politics, and the country's long-term stability. This flow of people and capital, coupled with illusions of national prosperity (about 30 per cent of the total population was living in poverty, see Hinnebusch 2013) partook in a process of redefining communal groups and boundaries, and sustaining the re-imagination of the Druze community (Anderson 1991) as a publicly distinguishable entity. Thus, whilst the Druze, especially those in close proximity to Muslim-majority cities, had historically refrained from publicly displaying religious affiliation as a way of protection and dissimilation (*taqiyya*, see Makarem 1979), the community now were publicly displaying its religion in a way that made it more Druze than ever before. Being a Druze, to use a phrase from Khuri (2004), in Jaramana entailed these intimate bonds forged not only through reincarnation but also through social relations and spatial distinctions. This public display of sectarian identification served to mask to some extent the economic, social and political differences that stratified the Druze community internally, along broader class divisions (Batatu 1999;

Haddad 2012; Hinnebusch 1990), that cross-cut Syria's religions, ethnicities and regions. Because most of the Jaramana Druze own some sort of property and many of them combine business or work income with income from rent, it is somewhat difficult to understand local class contours, distinctions and social capital. Most of Jaramanas Druze belong to the upper working and middle class in terms of income, whilst in terms of occupation there is a huge range from manual workers, to small business owners, as well as civil workers and professionals. There seems to be a positive relation between the wealth accumulation with length and breadth of social networks and family residence in Jaramana. However, one of the most obvious internal divisions in Jaramana is that of education and political affiliation. Formal education is opposed to religious Druze education of the *mijlis*: that religious people are uneducated was a phrase I often heard from within the circle of Druze intellectuals. And, this is a defining distinction between our two households of Abud-Haddad and Ouward: whilst both are financially well-off, the first through land, rent and occupation as the male offspring are independent tradesmen; the second through owning of a small business, they belong to different social circles: *bayt* Abud-Haddad is part of the religious elite; *bayt* Ouward is part of the politically dissident leftist intellectual elite (*muthaqafin*, literally 'cultured'). *Bayt* Ouward is mainly composed of university graduates, *bayt* Abud-Haddad only has one offspring in University education. What is more distinguishable perhaps is the global 'hierarchies of values' (cf. Herzfeld 2004) that *bayt* Ouward ascribes to: the globalised liberalism associated with international, modern, middle-class aesthetics and consumption; *bayt* Abud-Haddad, on the other hand, should one not know their economic standing, do not partake or try to partake in this global market of middle-class identification. As such, they are content to uphold traditional religious conduct, practices, aesthetics and power. It is based on this local distinction of religious versus new political elites, and the definition of middle class as a global category for 'modernity' and capitalist consumption and reproduction (Watenpaugh 2006), that I specifically define *bayt* Ouward as a 'middle-class' household.

Bayt *Ouward: Genealogical Memory, Political Resistance*

Bayt Ouward traces its origins to a Bedouin tribe in Yemen. Based on the family's genealogical tree, three ancestral brothers migrated around 1500 to Greater Syria, and settled in three different villages. Ouward

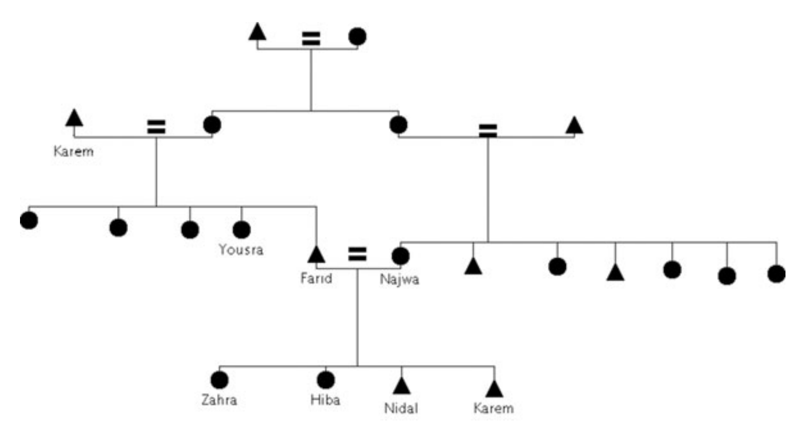


Figure 2.6 Kinship diagram of *bayt* Ouward.

was one of the brothers, and the head of the extended lineage (*bayt*) and settled in modern-day Lebanon. The father of Abu Nidal, Karem, migrated to Jaramana in 1920. Karem married a woman from a village in the Chouf Mountains, Lebanon, and had five children, born and raised in Jaramana, four daughters and Farid. Farid Ouward, born in 1941, was the only male heir of *bayt* Ouward. He inherited the family house, which is located on Shari'a al-'Alam.

Farid Ouward is married to his matrilineal cousin (see kinship diagram, Figure 2.6), Najwa, and they have four children: Zahra, Hiba, Nidal and Karem. Najwa's parents, migrated to Suwayda, the capital of the Druze province in Jabal al-'Arab, from Lebanon at the beginning of the twentieth century. Najwa's father, now in his 90s, lives in his grand European-styled mansion in Suwayda, and proudly recalls the days he was a General in Sultan Pasha Al-Atrash's army during the Syrian Independence Revolution (1925–7) against the French Mandate forces. Najwa grew up with her five sisters and three brothers in Suwayda, and moved to Jaramana after her marriage with Farid Ouward.

Najwa received primary education in Suwayda and she successfully passed the national university examinations into the Mathematics Department of Damascus University. Her father and family, however, vetoed her movement to Damascus, and instead she enrolled in a local institute to acquire teaching qualifications. Najwa explained, as we were looking through old black and white photographs – photographs of young Najwa with long hair and short skirts – that becoming a teacher

was a much more accepted occupational path for a young woman. However, her family valued education and, like other well-off families of the late 1960s, also saw the economic and social benefits of such a financial strategy in times of social change and radical political reforms. Najwa's two brothers were both studying at university: one in Damascus and the other in Spain. The decision to 'keep' Najwa in Suwayda was a correlate of both social as well as financial considerations, since supporting another family member away from home would have drained the family budget.

Farid had studied in the University of Cairo, in the years 1960–8, during the swirl of Nasserism and its painful aftermath in 1967, the Six-Day War. His leftist inclinations led him to become involved in several intellectual and activist circles in Cairo, and although he was never a sworn Nasserite, he supported the broad ideological platform of Arab socialism (*al-ishtiraqiyya al-'arabiyya*). Farid's acquaintance with Arab socialism in Egypt, as well as his support of the Lebanese Social Progressive Party headed by the Druze Kamal Joumblatt (see Hazran 2009), brought him at odds with the Syrian regime upon his return to Syria in 1969. Farid spent five months as a political prisoner. Upon his release, the secret services (*moukhabarat*) kept a close watch over him.

When Najwa got married to Farid, they moved into his house in Jaramana. As a married woman, Najwa enrolled in the University of Damascus and graduated after the birth of their first daughter, Zahra. She worked as a schoolteacher in Jaramana and so did Farid, but in the rural provinces of Syria; he believes that his postings to relatively secluded rural places were not coincidental, but a means of punishing his political dissent. During the early 1980s, a time of political turmoil in Syria, Farid was made to 'voluntarily' retire from his teaching job, due to his political involvement. It was during this time that Najwa, Farid, and his sisters, decided to start a family business and convert their house from a single-storey courtyard house into a modern, three-floor apartment building.

In 1985, Farid endured a life-threatening stroke, in the course of which he suffered an internal brain haemorrhage. He underwent a successful operation and five months of hospitalisation. Farid received a medical certification of 'brain damage'. With this certificate, the state authorities and secret services could not arrest him, or so Farid claimed, on the basis of his political conviction: 'I am free to say whatever I want,

for, if I show them this paper they know that I'm just mad and hence they cannot arrest me!' I cannot be sure of the certificate, as I never saw it, as I doubt that the *mukhābarāt* would consider medical reasoning, but Farid thoroughly enjoyed occupying a risqué oppositional stance vis-à-vis the government in Syria, which he constantly described as a dictatorship. He routinely made jokes against the president and the lack of freedom, whether he was with his family, friends or in his business with customers.

Conflict in a muthaqaf *Druze* bayt

In the late 1980s, the house was rebuilt from a ground level courtyard house into a three-storey apartment building. The ground floor of the apartment was converted into one spacious shop that looks out onto busy Shāri'a al-'Alam, whilst at the back of the ground floor the apartment of Yousra, Farid's eldest divorced sister, is located. There are rooms and open spaces in the basement, functioning as storage for the business, and a big open space that functions occasionally as a reception or *hafleh* (party) room.

Farid and Najwa live on the spacious first floor of the apartment building. The apartment is approximately 150 m^2, with nine rooms, marble floors and balconies to the front and rear of the house. It has two large living rooms and a spacious library/study. The kitchen, decorated with wooden cupboards, is decorated with a large marble sink and surfaces and has a large window looking out over Shāri'a al-'Alam. The family room, *qa'a*, is a much smaller room in comparison to other rooms in the house. During the cold winter months, this is the room the family spends much of its time in. There are three modern, functionally-defined bedrooms in the house for the daughters, sons, and the couple, and two toilets. It is interesting to note that the organisation of the house conforms to the traditional social expectation for social proximity by which distant guests are accommodated within one part of the house without the need to pass through any of the more intimate family rooms such as kitchen and bedrooms. With its two entrances and two toilets, *bayt* Ouward could be cut into two related but separate halves – one for the accommodation of guests and the other for the family.

The luxurious house has a very large living room decorated with baroque-style sofas and armchairs in royal blue, it contains Damascene in-laid mother-of-pearl wooden tables, and impressive paintings from

local artists depicting the Jaramana of previous times. Zahra, Najwa and I, were sitting in the living room with the air-conditioning on, sipping Arabic coffee in July 2009, when a different geography of the house and the family emerged in conversation. I recount that geography here, because, although 'immaterial' it permeates the materiality of the house, both its rooms and its social organisation.

Najwa had a miscarriage prior to the birth of Zahra, and when her daughter arrived everyone in the family rejoiced upon the news of the healthy baby. 'The family – well, my auntie Yousra to be precise – were less happy for the birth of my sister, Hiba,' said Zahra in a humorous tone.

> When Hiba was born I was almost four years old, and my mother returned from the hospital with Hiba and a doll for me. She said that my sister had brought this gift, and for many years I believed that Hiba had been in the belly of our mother with the doll!

Her humour alongside the recollections from childhood that she and her mother were recreating, were intended to alleviate the tensions of Zahra's imminent departure. Zahra had been living in Europe for many years, completing a doctorate. Her younger sister, Hiba, had joined Zahra, for higher education. Emigration is very common in Syria: to the Gulf, Europe, America, legally and illegally, for work and studies. Yet it is quite uncommon for females to pursue higher studies outside Syria. Although Umm Nidal helped her daughters to get into higher education and to travel outside of Syria, she was increasingly concerned about their marriage prospects: 'for an over-qualified woman it is difficult to find an equal husband in our society [. . .] and the more they [her daughters] grow older the more difficult it becomes'. Umm Nidal's daughters were not visiting Syria often: more than a year had passed since Zahra's previous visit. Now, Zahra had been in Syria for a week and she was due to leave in an hour.

'Yousra was happier when Nidal arrived [. . .] But I couldn't understand how my mother became Umm Nidal from Umm Zahra!' Keeping with Arabic traditions, the Druze follow the prevalent Arabic cultural patterns in naming: the parents take the name of their first-born son, and in his absence, the first-born daughter. Nidal was in his mid-20s, and also had a Damascus University degree. Umm Nidal had

been trying to find him a bride during my stay there, that is, a bride other than the girl that Nidal was in love with. That girl was deemed by Umm Nidal as 'uneducated' and not equal to him. Thus, although Nidal had not emigrated, his marriage preferences also caused tensions within the family.

On the day of her departure, Zahra's caustic humour was focused on Yousra, Farid's elder sister who lives in the building. The two women had a verbal disagreement the day before, and Yousra decided to go for an excursion to the holy places near Suwayda so that she would not be present at the time of Zahra's departure. Many pressures surrounded Zahra's presence in the house: when and whether she would return to Syria, who was to blame for Zahra's departure. In recreating pleasant common memories with her mother, Zahra was not only evoking the ties that bind a mother–daughter relation, but was painting a picture of Yousra, as a common, to her and Najwa, enemy. Zahra was remaking the story of childhood from her current point of view, in an attempt to reinforce the relationship with her mother.

As the story continued, Zahra narrated how she used to play in the neighbourhood always beyond her curfew, Najwa adding that Zahra used to be *galizah* (undisciplined). Najwa would punish her by grounding her, but Zahra would continue to disobey. I remember Najwa nodding her head in agreement, and looking at me during the story. I wondered whether this was to make sure that I understood or because she was avoiding looking at her daughter whose departure was daunting and painful. Maybe she also knew that the memories of childhood narrated were not so innocent, as they contained present implications, tensions and disagreements. Family relations were strained, although at that point, still brewing beneath the surface. Umm Nidal was concerned about her two daughters living in Europe: will they return, will they marry a Druze, is it her fault for letting them go? Abu Nidal was more concerned about philosophical and political matters than domestic politics. Nidal did not approve of his sisters' life outside of Syria and outside of the Druze realm of endogamy. He understood their reasons, but he argued somewhat cynically 'these are our traditions, this is our society, we cannot change them'. Only Karem, the youngest offspring of the family, supported his sisters. Being the youngest saved him the social pressure of marriage. At the time of the above conversation, and for some years prior to it, Najwa had been putting up with local rumours, and

their social implications, that her daughters were apostates. During and after this conversation, Najwa was increasingly critical of Farid's liberalism, and was turning to religion and tradition for solace.[4]

Futures: War Architecture

Ya zaman al-ta'ifiyyah, ta'i fiyyi wa ta'i fik

Ziad Rahbani

{Oh the sectarian times, they don't give a fuck for me or you}

This chapter has explored two interrelated themes: the Druze community of Jaramana as a heterogeneous historical entity; and the architecture of *bayt* as both a social unit and an idiom for relations as well as a material entity. Through the renditions of pasts and presents, the chapter demonstrates how houses are part of the wider social context and economic transformations in contemporary Syria. Moreover, through the juxtaposition of the two *bayt*s, it explores architecture as the embodiment of ideals and of practices, but also of ideals and practices that are not equally shared in the Druze sect or within a Druze family, revealing differences in taste, status, class and generation. The concept of *bayt* challenges the analytical distinction between the house and its inhabitants, emphasising the relational and material connection between social content and physical form. Through the architectural development of the house of Abud-Haddad, and through the shifting contours of a family conflict in the narrative construction of a common house and memory in *bayt* Ouward, this chapter shows how the materiality of the house changes along with changes in the social entity that dwells in it. In this direction, the chapter underlines that a relational approach needs to be combined with a historical understanding of change, through architecture. Relations, like houses, have pasts and futures, and sometimes their presents may hide more than what they reveal, just like the public/private façade of Arabic houses.

Finally, if houses are embodiments, and traces of the ongoing, fluid game of moral and lived resemblances and differences, as Bourdieu (2005) and Mitchell (1991) argue, then the houses themselves are such traces and processes. Whilst 'the house is a world within a world' (Bourdieu 2005: 282), the world within and outside of the house constantly expands and shrinks. The worlds which houses inhabit, and

the worlds their inhabitants create, are tense, contradictory and, borrowing from Strathern (2004 [1991]), partial and multiple. Houses are embodiments, but their traces, resemblances and differences are more nuanced, complex and uncertain than the location of their doors and windows.

But, if 'the legitimacy of the house stems partly from its capacity to endure' (Pine 1996: 445), then what form does this endurance take at times of war? Perhaps the 'sectarian times', as in the song of Ziad Rahbani, become firmly entrenched in the future trajectories, unearthed, as if by the latest bomb or shell. However, as demonstrated in the two cases, houses, in both social and material composition are always changing, their endurance firmly connected with their capacity to adapt, to combine and to reassemble. Then, it might not be such an exaggeration to extend Sulayman Khalaf's notion of *mukhadram*, the cultural collagist, from people to architectural and social *bayt*s, in order to underscore the patchwork through which change constitutes continuity. The danger for the *mukhadram,* then, are the solid physical boundaries that a war erects, be they sectarian, political or economic. In a Jaramana that is contested between government and opposition forces, internally divided by class and politics, 'natives' and refugees, in a Syria where no one side holds the olive branch of peace and justice, the architecture of war was succinctly summarised by my Syrian brother, Tariq Abud-Haddad: 'they fight, *we* die' (26 August 2013).

CHAPTER 3

BIRTH, DEATH AND REINCARNATION

Enthusing Bodies: Reflections

Kohl *that paints eyes of newborn children and of brides,* kohl *that paints Bedouin eyes and belly dancers, for protection and for beauty. Earth –* ‘ard*, on the eyes of the departed, so they leave this world* sabaan *– full. Bodies bathed in salt water and perfumes – smells that linger on the thresholds of life, death, and the transformations therein. New clothes and old passions. Bitter coffee and cardamon. Sugar and coconut for the new tooth, animal fat of designated ethnicity for the wedding, the neighbour's dinner in funerals. Tastes and smells, acts, events and sights and relations ritual, habitual and everyday. Bodies. Surrounded. Masked. Naked. Engulfed and engulfing. Bodies that perform. That change. That are acted upon. Or act upon other bodies. Bodies that, like smells, linger and dance on the thresholds. Dead bodies and eternal souls that come back, and they are born and re-born, easy to touch but hard to hold on. Bodies that struggle with other bodies, smaller and bigger; body parts dismembered and re-membered, in the struggles of sweat, blood, and lochia.*

I was looking for dances, all sorts and any. Folklore and pop, group dances and solos, oriental and western and some place other. I came looking for dances with my notepads and credentials, a camera, video recorder, past theories and future chapters. A step here and a movement there, I came looking for dances, choreographies and improvisations that I would somehow clumsily enter, decipher, and maybe dance. I came looking for dances, and this

was an excuse to come, and once there, I extended the arms and the legs of my excuse and tried to peep through the thighs. Embarrassed of the plasticity of my excuse as by my ogling eyes, I repeated to myself and to others that I came here looking for dances. Abu Nidal, then, introduced me to tarab*, old cassettes of Sabah Fakhri and local dissident* ḥaflehs*, and told me this is the music and these are the dances. Abu Samir turned on the* television Saudieh*, where women of presumed Iraqi nationality danced their long untied hair, he said that these are not our dances. Little Sarah, Nadwa and Lina were all, many times, playfully made to dance for me. And I was made to dance, amongst friends and friends of friends and relatives, in weddings, in gatherings. I was looking for dances, still.*

Turned heads. And shoulders. And I was looking for dances, but I could not find dances, maybe because they were not looking for me, maybe because there were no dances. I was looking for dances but how could I find bodyless bounded dances? I tried tracing bodies. Ethnic and gendered, political, fragile and dangerous, placid and enduring, wrinkled and regenerating. Can I talk of the sensations without sensualising? I can't talk of dance or of struggle, without a body. But then there is not one body, and there is not an unchanging body. I struggle with bodies, I guess. No, I confess, openly and honestly, that I struggle with bodies. So, I take the easy or the hard way out, or in, it depends on the frame of reference, and I write. I write a story, with a beginning, middle and end, of how events and narratives from Jaramana constantly construct bodies through what is known in anthropology as life-cycle rituals. Birth, marriage and death. A familiar tripartite structure. Or series of stories, because they all came to me when I was looking for dances and not bodies, and because they tamed me, and made me see dances. And besides, whatever you may say, ritual is like writing something with a light pencil and then having life or any body to walk over it, in muddy shoes, sweaty feet, toes filled with sea or desert sand and bloodied heels. And bodies dance on it and well beyond it.

Encountering Life and Death in Jaramana

Every birth is different. Every mortuary ritual varies. Yet, birthing and dying in the Druze community of Jaramana are ceremonials through which the ritual and the everyday penetrate one another, temporal and spatial occasions that negotiate religious, political and socio-economic orders, instances where the cosmological and the ordinary, life and death become intertwined. This chapter describes birth and death in Druze

Jaramana through contextualised and reflexive ethnographic accounts that are analysed in terms of history, society, religion and politics. As this book looks into the construction and negotiation of the body as a field of political, socio-economic and gendered struggles through the interlocking public arenas of the state and the community, we cannot proceed any further without looking into the social basis of corporeal beginnings and endings, and how the body is constructed and negotiated within the base-level of community. In this chapter, birth and death rituals and practices are viewed as dynamic, transformative events through which corporeality and its social boundaries are at once constructed and contested. As such, this chapter deals with the construction of bodies as a field of struggles within the Druze community and specifically addresses two questions: how is the body constructed, contested and negotiated through Druze ritual practices? And to what extent do ritual life-cycle events constitute fields of struggles?

Although ritual practices and life-cycle events are dynamic and embedded within the contexts of social practice, research on Druze rituals has not been adequately theorised, and does not include anthropological understandings of the interactions between ritual theories and practices (see Bourdieu 2007 [1977]; Bell 1992), people and histories (i.e. Wolf 1997; Asad 1973), people and power (see Foucault 1991a [1977]) and the practical narrative as well as embodied becomings therein (see, for example, Deleuze and Guattari 2005 [1987]; Gilsenan 1996; Jackson 2006; Seremetakis 1991). Ethnographic descriptions and analyses of Druze ritual and life-cycle practices are haunted by two interrelated problems. The first is the small number of ethnographic studies (Sweet 1974; Khuri 2004; Hood 2007), and the relative abundance of Orientalism, found in travel, missionary and academic literature of previous centuries (Hitti 1928; Seabrook 1928). This problem of accessibility and resources creates a veil of obscurity concerning contemporary Druze social structures, as Betts (1988) has rightly pointed out. The second problem arises, partly as a result of the confrontation with the lack of material and the apparent novelty of the endeavour, and partly as an impetus to fill-in the knowledge gaps. This is the problem of over-generalisations, dangerous simplifications, and the relative lack of historical and political contextualisation. The result is at times more effective or stuck in lengthy detailed descriptions of the ritual 'stages' as these take place 'among the Druze'. These descriptions are often

atemporal, and engrossed as authoritative writings on an apolitical culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986); they deny plurality, intentionality and partaking in a wider world of connections to their – depicted as passive – actors, whilst their own academic credibility goes undisclosed and is taken for granted. Here, I wish to analyse life-cycle rituals as embodied and transformative performances of political, social and gendered subjectivities and not as static relics of an eleventh-century heretical religion. In this regard, Seremetakis' analysis of mortuary practices is closer to my idea of Druze rituals: 'divinatory practices are self-reflexive metacommentaries on social and cosmological order [. . .] they can shatter the normative surfaces of everyday life [. . .] [they] are transformative [. . .] rather than residues of destroyed totalities' (Seremetakis 1991: 2).

This chapter first provides a background literature discussion on research regarding Druze history, religion and cosmological beliefs. This discussion aims to situate the fieldwork within relevant literature and debates, but I am hesitant to draw overarching conclusions regarding Druze ritual theory and practice. I describe natal and mortuary ritual practices situating them ethnographically and analytically within the fieldwork experience as well as the wider Syrian polity. The chapter ends with remarks on ritual transformations, embodied contestations and the interactions between local and not-so-local politics.

Emplacing the Druze: History and Contemporary Regional Realities

Druze is the popular name of a 'heterodox' Islamic sect that emerged during the Fatimid dynasty in eleventh-century Cairo. The speculations for the origins of the name 'Druze' are diverse and contested but in most probability, as Khuri (2004: 5) argues,[1] the name follows the general Middle Eastern pattern of name-giving for minority religions by the dominant Sunni populations: the name of the sect has been bestowed on them and comes from an early apostle-turned-heretic of the religious doctrine, Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Darazi (Khuri 2004: 18). The term 'Druze' is used by the members of the sect themselves, however the religious explicit term is preferred especially in contexts that are religious. This term is *muwaḥid* (pl. *muwaḥiddun*), meaning followers of the *tawḥīd* doctrine, *ahl al-tawḥīd* ('people of *tawḥīd*', Khuri 2004: 18), or *Bani Ma'rūf* ('the sons of benevolence', see Betts 1988: 16; Khuri 2004: 19). Following

Khuri (2004), I shall refer to the social category of the adherents as 'Druze', whilst reserving *muwaḥid* for explicitly religious affairs.

This section outlines Druze religion, history and politics, providing the reader with the necessary knowledge foregrounding the chapters that follow. However, there are a number of limitations in providing a history of the Druze religion that must be kept in mind. First, interpreting Druze religion has been, and continues to be, a largely Orientalist and highly speculative intellectual exercise. Most translations and interpretations of the Druze Epistles, the sacred religious book, depend upon the treatises of the continental father of Orientalism, Silvestre de Sacy,[2] and tend to regard religion as a static relic of the past. Secondly, since the eleventh-century Druze historians and popular renditions of tradition have rebuilt a mythological history, they 'have reconstructed the history of mankind in accordance with their beliefs [. . .] [Historical figures are no longer historical] they are what the Druze Epistles teach. Thus, history has become ahistoric, and the ahistoric history' (Firro 1992: 15). Thirdly, historiography in the bosom of a diverse and conflicting Middle East becomes a potent tool of political legitimacy, and history becomes the battleground for contesting opposing forces (Hazran 2009: 484): this is precisely the case of historical writings pertaining to the Druze throughout the twentieth century, particularly in Lebanon.[3] Fourthly, whilst Druze religious and social practices are mostly public, Druze religious scriptures and religious knowledge are secret, and access to them is allowed only to an initiated small part of the community (the *'uqqāl*, lit. knowledgable). Most Druze and most of my informants were not initiated (*juhhal*, lit. ignorant). Therefore, I have not been able to access any religious scriptures or discuss religion with members of the *'uqqāl*. This means that for the historical section below I had to rely on second-hand accounts that were not always verifiable through fieldwork. Finally, ethnographic material is scarce in terms of both Syria and Druze societies, and at times haunted with ethnocentric and generalising bias.[4] As a way of exposing, rather than solving, these limitations I have included extensive contextualised ethnographic descriptions in the following chapters.

Tawḥīd *History and Theosophy*

During the Abbasid Empire (AD 750–1258) regional Islamic dynasties emerged throughout the Muslim world (Cleveland 2004: 19). The

Fatimid Dynasty conquered Egypt in AD 969, founded Cairo as the dynastic capital and built the great mosque of Al-Azhar (Firro 1992: 5). Islamic dynasties were enriched through diverse local practices and the flourishing of different Islamic schools of thought (Hourani 2005 [1991]: 188); consequently, this produced a hive of intellectual activity through re-discoveries and Islamic re-interpretations of classical antiquity, Neoplatonic philosophy, Gnosticism, Hinduism, Persian thought and the emergence of Sufi mysticism. Religious interpretation of the Qur'ān and political factions had led to the emergence of three strands of Islam: the Sunni, Shi'i and Isma'ili.[5] The Fatimid Dynasty adopted Isma'ili Islam as the official dynastic religion.

Isma'ili Islam, like Sunni and Shi'i, takes the Qur'ān to be God's Word revealed, whilst it shares with Shi'i Islam the messianic concept of Imamate on the return of the divinely guided Imam (*al-mahdi* or *al-qa'im*).[6] The Isma'ili doctrine is based on the concept of an ineffable God and on the Neoplatonic theory of divine emanations (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 89–90; Betts 1988: 21; Firro 1992: 5–6). The theory of divine emanation means that everything that exists emanated or was created not *ex nihilo* (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 87–90). Furthermore, Isma'ili emanation sees creation and history as consisting of cycles and stages (*adwār* and *awkār*, Firro 1992: 6), in which periodic divine manifestations, perceived as cycles of manifestation (*dawr al-kashf*) take place (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 101), proceeding periodically to higher revelations. Through the lenses of Neoplatonic emanation, Qur'ānic interpretation 'took on two meanings, one exoteric (*ẓahir*) and the other esoteric (*baṭin*)' (Firro 1992: 6). This is connected to an 'Islamic adaptation of Platonic ideas' (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 93) similar to Sufism, of the representational connection between formal revelation as a symbol (*ẓahir*, *tanzīl*) and esoteric interpretation (*baṭin*, *t'awīl*), or put differently, the symbol and the symbolised (*al-mathal wa al-mamthūl*): '*ẓahir* and *baṭin* are *mathal* and *mamthūl*' (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 93; see also Firro 1992: 6). Thus, a first divine emanation was manifested through Sunni *al-shari'a* (*ẓahir* or exoteric Islam) and a second through Shi'i *al-ṭarīqa* (*baṭin* or esoteric Islam).

The Fatimid ruler al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996–1021) emerged as the last manifestation of divinity, and made a public declaration (*sijil*) in 1017 that a new era had dawned, after *al-shari'a* and *al-ṭarīqa*, the final cycle of *al-haqīqa* (truth, self-realisation and unity).[7] Re-appropriating

Sufi terminology and Isma'ili doctrine, the *tawḥīd* religion holds that God manifests himself to humans according to their capabilities and perceptiveness through periodic manifestations, of which *tawḥīd*, personified in al-Hakim, signalled the final manifestation.[8] The *tawḥīd* doctrine shares with Isma'ilism the concept of God as Existence,[9] and the Neoplatonic idea of divine emanation. However, being the last divine manifestation, adds the final parameter (*tawḥīd*), a requirement that only through which unity is achieved, differentiating and defining itself thus as a completely different religion.[10] With Caliph-Imam al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, the third and last cycle of divine manifestation began and, after 25 years in 1046, ended. During the period of the Druze *da'wa* (divine call), new adherents would sign their names and profess their faith by binding oath-taking. The finite period of proselytism ended in part due to the historical circumstance (in 1021 al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah disappeared and his successors persecuted adherents of *tawḥīd*), and in part because based on Druze cosmology only those who are prepared to receive the blessing of self-realisation, a finite number in any given time, would enter *al-haqīqa*.

During the rule of al-Hakim religious and social changes took place, such as the revocation of the *imāma* hereditary system (Firro 1992: 10), abolition of slavery and redistribution of state property (Abu-Izzedin 1984: 79), whilst under the new doctrine, *muwaḥid* men and women were granted equal rights in marriage, divorce and property, and polygamy was denounced. The[11] *muwaḥiddun* were granted equality and the vindication of divine justice (*'adl*) through the continuous transmigration of the *muwaḥid* soul only to a *muwaḥid* body (Firro 1992: 12). Ritual and symbolism were deemed unnecessary mediums for the realisation of God's unity since they were emblems of previous cycles of manifestation and since relationship to the Divine is envisioned as a personal Gnostic journey (Khuri 2004, 2006: 61–78). During this final revelatory period 'there were to be no more rituals, nor equivocation. "A spiritual doctrine without any ritualistic impositions" was born' (Taqiyyuddin in Makarem 1979 [1974]: 23). Finally, seven duties (*al-shurūṭ al-sab'a*) for social conduct were instituted to be applied in communities of *tawḥīd* adherents:

1. Recognition of al-Hakim and strict adherence to monotheism.
2. Negation of all non-Druze tenets.
3. Rejection of Satan and unbelief.

4. Acceptance of God's acts.
5. Submission to God for good or ill.
6. Truthfulness.
7. Mutual help and solidarity between fellow Druze.

(Betts 1988: 19)

Based on the Gnostic eclectic perception that divine knowledge cannot be acquired by everybody, the Druze Epistles were viewed as an intimate divine manifestation that should not be shared neither openly nor widely with people that may be incapable of grasping it or prone to corrupt it.[12] This Gnostic eclecticism further differentiated the community of believers, this time internally, through distinguishing between those enlightened and initiated into accessing the secret and sacred knowledge, the *'uqqāl*, and those uninitiated, the *juhhal* (Betts 1988: 16). This distinction has created a differentiated power balancing mechanism in which the *'uqqāl* are the representatives of religious authority and within the *juhhal* rests political authority (Khuri 2004).

The Body and Druze Theology

> O you who are distracted, how can he who is devoid of his corporeal means obtain knowledge? O you who are heedless, how can he who abandoned his sensual faculty reach ignorance? And O you who are perplexed, how can the souls exist by themselves? And how can they settle in their origin, and yet have a life and procure their pleasures?
>
> (al-Muqtana Baha'uddin, Druze Epistle 75, cited in Makarem 1979 [1974]: 54–5)

In Druze theological perspectives the body is portrayed as the garment or shirt (*qamis*) of the soul: a temporal body dresses an eternal soul, and as the corporeal body withers, the soul passes to another body, because the soul cannot be manifested or expressed but only through its corporeal means. The familiar philosophical dichotomy of body/soul is cast in a non-dualistic light in the passage above as well as throughout the 111 Epistles that make up the holy scriptures of the Druze Canon, *Rasahl al-Hikmah* (written between 1017–42) (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 108; Firro

1992: 13). The emphasis shifts from duality to the 'strict and uncompromising' (Abu-Izzeddin 1984: 111) unity of God, and unity of all that He has created – this concept is the basis of the *tawḥīd* doctrine,[13] the foundation of Druze religious beliefs in the absolute unity of God. This interlocking of spirituality (*laṭīf*) and corporeality (*kathīf*) within an ongoing process of soul actualisation in corporeal embodiment, forms the basis of the Druze belief in reincarnation, or human-to-human transmigration of the soul (*taqamuṣ*).[14] As the belief in reincarnation frames the construction and negotiation of the 'body' in ritual and everyday practices in the Druze community of Jaramana, in this section the relationship between the body and soul will be explored in the light of Druze theosophical beliefs and their historical background, providing thus, an imperative foil or abet for discussing contemporary Druze births and deaths.

Tawḥīd cosmology sees God as both transcendent (*munazzah*) and immanent (*mawjūd*): 'the absolute Existent transcends the world while being immanent in it' (Makarem 2006: 3). In Druze cosmogony the world is a manifestation of God's Will and it came to be through five successive cosmic principles, otherwise known as dignitaries or luminary entities *al-ḥudūd al-khamsa* (Makarem 1979 [1974]: 40–9; Abu-Izzeddin 1984; Firro 1992). These five cosmic principles are: the *'Aql* (translated as Universal Mind, Intelligence or Nous), *Nafs* (Universal Soul and Activity), *al-Kalima* (the Word, principle of being), *al-Sabiq* (Precedent or Right Wing, cosmic unity) and *al-Tali* (the Follower or Left Wing, physical unity and corporeality). The existence of the world is borne out of an amoeba-like process in which principles are constituted *because* of their relations and subsequent struggles. It is *relationships* that create separate entities (subjects) and not the existence of separate objects that form (subjective) relationships as a consequence.[15]

The human soul is to the human body as it is meaning to a word. Just as a meaning makes sense only when expressed through its word, so must the human soul be expressed in a human body. The human soul realises itself in the human body. The human body, therefore, serves as the sole medium for the human soul to achieve actualisation and to participate in the progress of man towards knowledge and self-realisation. The true knowledge of the oneness of God, through which man realises his purpose of feeling as much in union with the one as is humanly possible,

can only be achieved through man's gradual yet continuous spiritual experience and through his constant preparedness for the Gnostic discovery of human union with the One. For the Druze, the span of a single life is not enough for an individual to realise this ultimate purpose (Makarem 2006: 5).

This human body, therefore, underlines issues of complementarity and opposition, which are not however binary because they are borne out of the amoebic processes of creation.

Through reincarnation, man's spirit is constantly invested on earth and this manifestation happens directly after death since whereas the soul is internal it can only find expression and realisation through corporeality. Under the tenet of reincarnation the body becomes much more than a medium (Makarem 1979 [1974], 2006), it becomes the phenomenological horizon through which being, experience, knowledge are realised, whilst at the same time it cannot disassociate itself by virtue of the metaphorical weight of the original sin.

Dying in Jaramana

The previous section has delineated the historical and theological background of Druze beliefs. Historical particularities and specific belief systems are not, on their own, sufficient explanatory modes or causal links to understand contemporary practices. Nonetheless, because the Druze are a particular religious community about which little research has been conducted, these references are necessary. In the sections that follow, contemporary ritual practices of birth and death are discussed and analysed. I begin with an exploration of rituals and practices surrounding death, and then birth. The ethnographic descriptions in this part of the chapter appear in actual chronological order; encounters that shaped my perceptions and understanding of death, reflecting the slow process through which access and familiarity fluctuated and thus forms a significant part of the ways I came to 'know' about death rites and rituals. Beginning with practices of death and then going to birth, although it may seem counter-intuitive, also emphasises the Druze beliefs of reincarnation, by which death is the start of a new life.

In Jaramana, as in Damascus, burials take place rather quickly–either eight hours after death or on the next day. Death announcements travel by way of Abu George as well as through word of mouth and

telephones. Close relatives arrive at the house of the deceased, and the body is ritually washed by same-gender carers or spouse, gender seclusion does not happen in the case of children. The body is dressed in fine clothes and covered with a white shroud (*kafan*). In the case of an unmarried man or woman, they are dressed in bridal clothes and a candle is placed near the head.[16] Then, usually the morning after death, the body is taken to the women's *mawqaf*, located off Shari'a al-Khudr and near the male *mawqaf*. The male *mawqaf* is open on the top, whilst the women's is enclosed. After a couple of hours, men congregate outside the women's *mawqaf*, the body is placed in the coffin which is then closed (Hood 2007: 150), and carried on the arms and shoulders of non-immediate relatives, in a procession with the religious *mashāykh* at the head, to the male *mawqaf*. There, the coffin is placed on an elevated platform, where relatives and friends give eulogies enumerating the person's life history and good deeds (*shahadat* – testimonies). Next, the *mashāykh* recite *ash'ār dīniyya* (religious poetry) and call the final prayer. The coffin is then carried either by a procession or in a van to the north-western border of Jaramana where the Druze cemetery (*turbeh* or *marbara*) is located. Only men are permitted in the cemetery. The body is taken out of the coffin and some ground sand is placed on the eyes of the dead, so that s/he leaves *sabaan* (fulfilled, as in not hungry) and because 'we come from the earth and return to the earth,' explained Umm Samir adding that '*khalās* (finish, as in 'done'), now the soul has left it is just the body.' Finally, the body is placed in the earth and the grave is cemented on the top and bottom. Although Hood (2007: 152) mentions that the cemetery is visited by relatives for 40 days after death, informants in Jaramana stated that they do not visit the cemetery: 'In our religion we believe that the body is not important – the soul is. In death only the body is lost. The soul will come back.'

The practice of strict gender segregation during the burial is interesting: does it reflect cosmological gender devisions in the afterlife, or is it a practice that the Druze of Jaramana have re-appropriated from their geographically closer Sunni Muslims neighbours? Although it would be analytically hard to point to which came first (the cosmology or the practice), as much as methodologically problematic (how can we separate them and indeed why shall we), this instance needs further clarification. First, Druze informants, including *shaykh*s, do not share a uniform belief on

whether reincarnation is gendered or not. Some believe that the same gender is maintained, some not. An esoteric dialectic, I have been told, allows different kinds of interpretation of the faith to emerge. Secondly, I have elsewhere recounted other ritual practices (such as gender segregation during marriage, in Chapter 4), and legal practices (see Chapter 2) that the Druze of Jaramana share with their geographically closer Sunni Muslim neighbours and that differentiate the Druze of Jaramana from other Druze communities. Instead of making an analytical simplification in choosing one or the other explanation for the practice of gender segregation, the emphasis could be maintained on this as a form of contradiction and struggle.

Announcing Death

Jaramana's Druze inhabitants do not wake up in the morning to the sound of *adhān*, the Muslim call for prayer, as neither mosques[17] exist nor a commandment for the public expression of religiosity (Khuri 2004), since relation to God is perceived as a personal, not public, matter. Instead, they frequently wake up to the sound of Abu George's[18] voice coming out of a megaphone on a car: 'With contentment and submission, we declare the death of...' (Khuri 2004: 226). Then Abu George gives the name and the family of the deceased person, and relays all the relevant information: the time of the funeral in the *mawqaf*, or, if the deceased person has died somewhere else, such as in Suwayda, the place and time for the buses that will travel there and back. This loud and public way of announcing death and facilitating the communal exchange of condolences seems to exist only in Jaramana and Jabal al-'Arab (Hood 2007: 148), yet the public declaration of death is noted in studies of Druze mortuary rituals (Hood 2007: 148). Abu George's role is a kind of social institution, a position mediating religious doctrine and social solidarity in which the advertisement of human loss escapes the confines of a particular family or village and transforms itself into a communal affair. Indeed, based on Druze cosmology and belief in reincarnation (*taqamuṣ*), the death of someone not only affects those who knew her/him whilst alive, but also those who might have known her/him in a past life, and those to whom s/he might be a relative or a friend in the future (Bennett 2006; Oppenheimer 1980). Thus, death is not the abrupt cessation of relationships, but their corporeal and ongoing transformations.

Furthermore, Abu George's announcement is not less public than the social expectation (read obligation) to publicly attend funerals: '*kul al-balad*' (all of the region), '*lāzim*' (must) were the most frequent replies to my questions regarding who attends funerals, followed by critical expressions such as *ḥarām*,[19] should one who is able to, decide not to attend. Khuri (2004: 227) explains attendance at funerals as a religious duty rewarded (*'ajr*) in the afterlife and as a marker of social status, whilst Hood adds that the obligation to attend is a fulfilment of the Druze commandment '*ḥifz al-ikhwān* (protecting or safeguarding the brethren)' in addition to the performance of the religious duty of mercy (*al-raḥma*) (Hood 2007: 147).

The anthropological account that comes closer to my own fieldwork experience of the public and communal aspect of the Druze death announcement, comes from Sweet's (1974) analysis of visiting patterns and social flows in a Lebanese Druze village. Sweet describes the striking pervasiveness of the 'continuous movement of formally or informally structured visiting over all time dimensions' (1974: 112), a movement that enmeshes villagers into webs of complex social, political and economic relations. Within these webs, internal and external boundaries are constructed or diffused through constant negotiations (Sweet 1974: 114–15), and out of which the viability of the 'village' as the most successful social and economic unit of production depends (Sweet 1974: 114). Although Sweet's analysis is not beyond the limitations of the time and contexts of her research, it does provide both thick descriptions as well as dynamic analysis of the social fabrics that make social networks 'the essence of life' (Sweet 1974: 113) in a Druze context.

Sweet categorises visits as *preliminary* and/or *in themselves* (1974: 116), the first type refers to visits that cement and foreshadow future visits and transactions (partaking to alliances, contracts, etc.), whilst the latter refers to annual ceremonies and life-cycle events that are 'conspicuously ceremonialised and are rituals in themselves' (Sweet 1974: 118). To the extent that all social interactions and relations are preliminary in the sense that they are not abstracted from an uninterested subject without history or future, and without ability of intersubjective interactions, then Sweet's high ceremonials[20] are always already preliminary too. However, her analysis points out the importance of social dynamics that characterise any such relations, the pervasive habitus of communal visits, and the socio-political and economic negotiations that take place within

the realm of visits. These visits form the significant backbone or context through which social interactions, including the publicity of the funeral announcement, take place.

Specifically regarding 'high ceremonials' such as death, Sweet (1974: 118) notes that 'they may lift an event in the lives of people out of individual or small-scale impact and socialize it within the community framework at a range of involvement commensurate with the status of the family or individual affected'. The public announcement of death, and the recognised obligation to attend the funerals of other Druze in Jaramana are not only 'prime occasions for the public reconfirmation of communal ties and religious values' (Hood 2007: 147), they are also performances: creative instances of intersubjective articulation and expression. As performances, they are also bound to the contexts in which they emerge, that is to local politics and relations of power, and they have the potential of creating spaces for negotiation and resistance. In the ethnographic description in the following section, the political and temporal negotiation of the mortuary ritual as a vehicle of simultaneously both hegemony and resistance becomes clear.

The Spectacle of Death

> [Fieldnote 31 March 2009] *Abu Hasan came by in the morning to announce the death of Naji Jaber, a famous middle-aged Druze actor widely known as Abu Antar (one of his television roles) who died of cancer. Amidst the* 'allah yarḥamou' *(May God have mercy on his soul) that were exchanged, Abu Hasan was excited to inform us that Jaramana had come to a halt: the streets were packed with people and television vans, famous actors that were attending the funeral, and visitors from Lebanon,* 'millioun, millioun al-nas!' *(millions of people). We walked Abu Hasan to the door, exchanging* 'al-'awad bi-salamatikom' *(may God compensate your sorrows through a healthy life) when we noticed a televison van parked outside our home. As Abu Hasan was leaving, two female neighbours, the age of Umm Samir, were coming back from the street, dressed in black and wearing the Druze white* futah *(head scarf). We greeted each other and with enthusiasm and humour they told us about all the famous artists that had arrived in Jaramana from Syria and Lebanon, and how most of them wore huge black glasses – in order to disguise themselves but to no avail!*

Death is a communal affair (Khuri 2004; Hood 2007) and communicating news of death cannot but be shared between family members and neighbours. As a communal affair, death is not an individual loss but affects the whole of Druze community; hence, condolences are not given only to the deceased's immediate family but are also exchanged between all members of the community, regardless of whether they personally know the deceased person. During a Druze funeral there is a social expectation that whoever can, will attend the funeral; nevertheless, the number of those who attend constitutes a marker regarding the social status of the deceased (Khuri 2004: 227). In the case of Naji Jabr, the plethora and celebrity status of the funeral attendants is a clear social marker. However, almost inevitably, the numbers and status of funeral attendees somewhat shifts the social and religious emphasis on the deceased and his/her community, allocating attention upon the high profile participants. This shift not only creates a spectacle of death and of attending celebrities, but relocates Jaramana from the minority, closed, 'dirty' and 'unruly' suburb to the centre of attention. The advertisement of famous 'outsiders' in Druze Jaramana is an expression of the cultural and social significance of the group, notable in Abu Hasan's enthusiasm, which at the same time constitutes the Druze as a coherent separate entity as well as an integral part of the cultural milieu within Syria and the wider region. Not only is the community's cohesion and importance reconfirmed, but also through the humorous social commentary of the neighbours the 'theatrical partitions' (Jackson 2006: 281) of the celebrities are deconstructed, showing how whilst a Druze middle-aged woman might well be on the margins of cultural and political developments, she nevertheless has the power to recognise and, as in this case, ridicule those who occupy centre stage.

> *Umm Samir suggested to Tariq, her son, to 'take me to see'. I dressed in black and Umm Samir gave me her* futah *– I hesitated to wear it, thinking it might be something of a religious blasphemy for a non-adherent. As if she'd read my thoughts, Umm Samir placed the* futah *on my head saying repeatedly "ādi, 'ādi' (normal). She told Tariq to let me go inside the women's* mawqaf, *but he was uneasy and hesitant and afterwards told me he'd prefer me not to since women 'may understand...'*

The difference between the mother's and son's attitudes regarding permitting access to the religious ritual to a foreign anthropologist is

indicative of the different statuses between the mother and son, and especially speaks to the mother's seniority. This is interesting because it may appear as ironic or contradictory that 'older and conservative' generations are actually more socially flexible. Moreover, as we noted in the discussion of the different houses (in Chapter 2), those with greater social legitimacy have greater dexterity in interpreting normative behaviours.

> *Shari'a al-Khudr was full of black-dressed people. Shopkeepers were standing at the doors of their shops, looking curiously at the masses. We took a right turn to the* mawqaf *street, it was packed with people and journalists. Outside of the female* mawqaf *a large group of women were waiting to go in. Peeping through I could see the white metallic door with the five-coloured star open, women in black and white amphitheatrically sitting facing a small platform (that, I could not see but I knew it was there from informants' descriptions). Men had started gathering around the male* mawqaf, *some ten metres up the same street. Tariq and I went up to Fadi's terrace that was overlooking the male mawqaf and the street. On the terrace to the left al-Jazeera's crew was filming and reporting. The usually grey skyline of Jaramana was also transformed: on terraces and balconies people eagerly watched.*

The street ambiance in Jaramana did not resemble other funerals, whilst the influx of people, the continuous flow of information and the not always discrete curiosity resemble a society of spectacle. 'Life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into representation' Guy Debord (2005 [1977]: 1–7) argues, because modern conditions of production resulting from the accumulation of capital and division of labour, serve to alienate and isolate workers from what they produce. Within the contexts of a political 'Western' philosophy that has evolved a visual bias, 'the language of the spectacle consists of signs of the dominant system of production – signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system' (Debord 2005: 2). In Debord's sense, mass media only partly contribute to the society of spectacle: 'the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated through images'. (Debord 2005: 1) In Jaramana, the occasion of Naji Jaber's funeral was not only a spectacle because of its publicity

and entertaining ambiance. Mediated by his television persona, the deceased and his high-profile attendees provide for the representation-mediated relationship that Debord places at the crux of his 'spectaclist' society (Debord 2005: 3). Attracted by the outside visitors that are not just visitors but famous celebrities, inhabitants break away with the formalities of traditional hospitality and instead take to the streets in order to get near and see those representations unmediated.

Following Debord, neither the physical proximity nor the actual seeing of a celebrity ever ceases to be unmediated; informed and constructed by the mass media the representation is only reaffirmed. However, this spectacle of death conforms with Jaramana's relations to the 'outside world' and the multi-fold interpretations of a funeral as spectacular reaffirm that both Druze and Jaramana are as much as they always have been parts, maybe marginal but nevertheless parts, of wider socio-political and economic relations of production and reproduction. Rituals like funerals instead of being static bounded entities are always already part of the wider webs of interconnections and historical interrelations. But can relations of domination as described by Debord be actually subverted and resisted from the margins?

> *After an hour, at 1pm, a closed coffin covered with a blue cloth was carried out of the women's* mawqaf *and in procession led by 15* mashāykh *into the male* mawqaf, *and there it was placed on a stone elevation. The* mawqaf *does not have a roof and is of an asymmetrical rectangular shape. On the side of the entrance there is the platform, whilst on all surrounding walls there are rows of seats. People came in, offered condolences, and before the* mashāykh *begin their prayers, speeches were made by family members and other dignitaries, testimonies* (shahadat) *of the deceased's life deeds. One of the testimonies, by someone from the Artists' Union, mentioned the President of the Republic*, al-rayes *Bashar al-Assad, and people started clapping: 'it is not correct to clap in the* mawqaf, *but people must clap when they hear that name,' Tariq said somewhat uneasily and somewhat jokingly when I asked why the* mashāykh *aren't clapping. After the epitaph speeches, the fifteen* mashāykh *surrounded the coffin, making a half-circle around it reciting ash'ār* dīniyya *(religious poetry) – Tariq noted that they make this formation with their bodies because 'it is not nice to have your back turned (to the deceased and the audience) as the Muslims do.' At the end of the prayers envelopes with money (as explained by Tariq) were passed around to*

> *the* mashāykh *as charitable donations. The coffin, finally, was carried outside amidst loud shouting and war-like intonations and placed in a white van. Naji Jaber was buried the same day in the Bab M'Sala cemetery. {In the following weeks I would be asked, mainly by young women, to show the photographs taken in order to check out the attending celebrities. Unfortunately, my photographs must have been somewhat disappointing since no celebrities were identifiable.}*

Debord stresses the tautology and pervasiveness of the Society of Spectacle. Yet some of the examples above, such as the open defiance of the Druze *mashāykh* in clapping for the president, the co-construction and affirmation of difference (and superiority) between 'us' and 'Muslims' in Tariq's explanation, as well as that so many celebrities had to come and honour a Druze in Jaramana, provide powerful narratives of subversion and manipulation of the spectacle in a counter-hegemonic way. Whilst both the Druze religious minority and the suburb of Jaramana lie at the margins of state sovereignty and spectacle capitalism, this does not stop the marginalised in reinforcing and resisting the very 'centre' that both constructs them as different. That is not to say, however, that the alternative counter-hegemonic embodiments challenge their structural domination – on the contrary it furthers crystallises it by adopting the structuring dichotomy of centres and peripheries (Bourdieu 1994: 90–1). Yet, celebrity deaths can also be read through an existential prism:

> The difference between our responses to the death of stars and to the death of mere mortals hinges on the depth of our attachment, not to them, but to the narratives in which they figure – narratives that hold out the illusory promise that mortals and immortals may merge. [. . .] [What is more profoundly mourned is] the death of a narrative that had connected our own subjectivity to the wider subjectivity of the world. [. . .] We need heroes, gods, and stars to be sure, but above all we need to feel that *we* participate in the divine and that *they* are within our reach, within the realm of our own choosing.
>
> (Jackson 2006: 283–5, emphasis in original)

Months after the public spectacle of Naji Jaber's funeral, this story was narrated by Abu Samir and Abu Talal: 'On the same day, after Abu Antar's

(Jaber's nickname from a famous role) funeral, the funeral of an old Druze woman took place. She was living on her own, she was poor, she had no children or relatives. But all the people who were there for Abu Antar's funeral went to hers too. She must have had a very good soul and God rewarded her.' This is another example of celebrity deaths providing the context or pretext for a narrative structure to arise in which the celebrity-quality, some star-like light spills over to ordinary men and women.

Narratives of Life and Death

> [Fieldnote 6 April 2009] *'His wife, Latifah, woke up in the morning to make breakfast for their two children. She came in {the bedroom} to wake him up and found him dead! He knew he had a heart problem, may God have mercy on his soul, but he did not want to do the operation. He was coughing. Even though he was such an active person, always making jokes, and he was handsome, and tall. He was young, 45. Even his colour was so natural seeing him in the open hearse inside the women's* mawqaf, *made you think he'd wake up! His death is such a shock* (moufāj'a) – *no one expected it . . . And there were so many people at the* mawqaf *mourning the first day: 1000 women, 2000 men. Do you remember how the night before his death we were all together, his two sisters too, at the* ḥafleh musiqiyyeh*?'*

Umm Nidal had just returned home from the funeral. The signs of exhaustion and mourning were easily readable in her red eyes and tense body. Sharing bitter tea and condolences, *al-awda bi-salamtik*, we talked about death. The deceased man was an affinal relative, her brother, Faris, was married to the deceased's sister, Suha, and the two families, living in close proximity in Jaramana have a warm, cordial relation. As a tragic irony, the day before his departure, Umm Nidal, two of the deceased's sisters and I had been celebrating at an entertainment centre in Jaramana, in a music party organised by Abu Nidal. Umm Nidal started the discussion by the narration of the chronologically closer events: the 'inside' details of when death arrived, the colour of the deceased's face. These details are both intimate and shocking, whilst the story's narration was punctuated with the advert of contingency.

> *She said that he was the youngest of Suha's brothers, they are eight in total: five brothers and three sisters. His father had also died young, of*

heart disease, in his 40s. They were orphaned at a young age. She repeated proudly how the mother of the deceased had accomplished sending all of her children to university, and she died only shortly after the last one's graduation. The family came from a peasant, poor background, and the brothers finished university whilst working in farms picking apples. Umm Nidal gave me short descriptions of all of the siblings: engineers, scientists, a dentist and teachers, the brothers living abroad in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, one of the sisters living in Lebanon, and the two that I know living in Jaramana. They are all here now. Umm Nidal's face was now less stressed, her posture, lying on the couch, more relaxed.

A similar version of this life story was weaved later in the night in the company of nine relatives. Enacted and embodied through additional information or nodding of heads in agreement, an epitaph was recreated and shared, a commemoration of adversity and persistence in equal measure, featured in the epigrammatic communal remembering and retelling of his life story, past struggles, and, for his wife and two children, the difficulties ahead. This process of narrative storytelling transformed death as tragic but collective. Gilsenan connects narratives, power and persons through narrative structures of social life and through the enactment of stories in a changing society (1996: 57), by performing a literary analysis of everyday life and an anthropological analysis of oral stories. Applying this technique to Umm Nidal's story, we notice how she presents the deceased as part of a wider family, whose struggles and successes he is an integral part of, including all the culturally relevant information, such as his lineage, father and mother, and professional occupations of his siblings. Furthermore, the recollection of hardship, both economic (poverty, work in farms) and psychological (loss of father), in the narrative of someone's life adds a heroic dimension to the character of the deceased – a dimension that not only draws him vividly to the outsider anthropologist, but justifies his life and acutely hints at the tragedy of his death. In this regard, forgetting or leaving outside the mortuary, certain negative characteristics such as his temperament or 'control over his wife,' are also an active process.[21]

Umm Nidal's story and the subsequent retelling by the group of gathered relatives was not just directed at painting a portrait of the deceased man. As the act of storytelling is always a form of intersubjective dialogue, Umm Nidal and her relatives collectively and actively

constructed a temporal space that allowed them to negotiate the life and deeds of the dead man, transforming at once his life and death into a collective epitaph: 'storytelling is both dialectically imperative and perennially redemptive' (Jackson 2006: 253). Or, put differently:

> Stories take us out of ourselves. Stories belong to the in-between spaces of intersubjectivity [...] storytelling is a modality of working with others to transform what is given, or what simply befalls us, into forms of life, experience, and meaning that are collectively viable.
>
> (Jackson 2006: 252)

> *Towards the end of our conversation Umm Nidal's commentary became more detached as she moved the conversation from the particular death to general mortuary rituals of the Druze: how here mourning lasts for three or seven days, how the dead are dressed with their finest garments, how the dead are not covered like Muslims are, how men and women have different* mawqaf *and different houses that they congregate because it is more 'relaxed', how people, neighbours or distant relatives, cook for the family of the deceased, and how we would go together at the deceased's house the day after.*

Umm Nidal and I slip to the seemingly objective sharing of general information regarding Druze mortuary practices, a common relationship between anthropologist and informant (see Cowan 1990: 96–7). However, allow me to use Umm Nidal's narrative as an excuse to sketch some practices pertaining to the ritual of death in Jaramana, beyond the specific narration. This sketch shall be brief since both Khuri (2004) and Hood (2007) have provided extensive accounts of the funeral day – the sketch will also underline the differences between those accounts and practices widely held in Jaramana, and in doing so the very concept of statically defined ritual. Ritual practice is always changing and especially since the rapid urbanisation of Jaramana (Chapter 2), ritual practices have become more 'condensed'.

Al-'usbūʿ *or Pain is Like a Soap*

After bereavement, the deceased's family is seldom left alone: relatives, neighbours and eventually most of the region's household representatives

visit them, spending long hours in the company of the family. Pain is perceived as a communal affair/obligation and taking part in sharing the pain is socially more important than for happy occasions (Ammar 1998 in Hood 2007: 147). This is because extreme pain, duress and stress are perceived as dangerous for the mental state of the family; the expression describing this condition is *ta'abān nafsiyan* (exhaustion of self/spirit), *ta'ab* (n.) literally means 'tiring out' but is widely used in Syria to describe an array of negatively perceived mental states ranging from sadness, to depression and other mental health conditions. The common denominator of these mental states is the indulgence in an individualised affliction, which is perceived as an antisocial behaviour and thus challenges communal solidarity. 'All things are born small and grow up. Only pain is born large and then gets smaller. Like the soap,' explained Umm Samir, pointing out that pain gets smaller only through communal bonds and sharing. The reconciliation between personal pain and communal solidarity comes from the communal embodiment and sharing of pain that combines individual and social loss into a designated spatio-temporal ceremonial ritual: *al-'usbū'*.

Although there has been adequate attention regarding the funeral ritual amongst the Druze, almost nothing has been written about the pervasive and encompassing weekly ritual visits of the *Usbu'a*. Hood (2007) does not mention this custom, Khuri provides a different description.[22] *Al-'usbū'* (lit. week) is a social ritual that lasts for a week after the deceased's funeral in which throughout most of the day and evening the family of the deceased receives condolences and visits either in the *mawqaf* or, more often, in the house of the deceased. During the *Usbu'a* visitations, the deceased's family receives guests who come to offer condolences and spend time with the bereaved family. Gender segregation is strictly followed on this occasion, through the designation of separate rooms or more often houses, that accommodate female and male guests (usually a nearby relative or neighbour provides their house which tends to be used for the male visitors).

[7 April 2009, 20:00] *Girding the walls of a large living room space, 32 women dressed with black clothes and white headscarves stood up as Umm Nidal and I entered the fourth-floor apartment located on a road perpendicular to Shari'a al-'Am. In the elevator, she instructed me to say*

in formal Arabic 'ana ḥzint ktir; al-'awad bi-salamatikom' *(I am very sad; may God compensate {your sorrows} through well-being), yet the tragedy and unfamiliarity of the situation made me uneasy at the first instance: women that I knew and that I did not know stood up, from the left side of the room to the right. Was I to greet every one? Even the ones that are not relatives? How would I know who's a relative and who is not?*

Following Umm Nidal's movements and taking cues from the standing women I soon realised that, in death as well as in any social gathering in the Druze community of Jaramana, whenever a new person arrives to the house all the people already there stand up and greet by shaking hands or, depending on social proximity and gender, by giving three kisses on the cheeks. Death is not an altogether different situation, and the ritual etiquette that exists in everyday practices is further extenuated, as salutations become condolences (ta'āzi) *that are shared with everyone present, and by extension within the whole of community. Death is not an 'individual thing' but a communal affair of the highest degree, a practice that strengthens communal solidarity further through the cosmological beliefs in human reincarnation.*

Latifah, the deceased's wife, was first on the line. Red eyes without tears, a posture of sad and beautiful dignity, a woman in her 40s whose quiet pain and restraint filled the room. Afterwards, Umm Nidal told me 'Look at his wife... She's so young... Ya ḥarām!' *Next in the line was Umm Hussein, the deceased's sister. In her early 50s, Umm Hussein is a stunning woman, very tall, beautiful, and usually very jovial. I was staggered by the redness of her eyes and her stark transformation. I could hardly keep my tears. Yet I was most taken aback by Layla, the deceased's unmarried sister. Without sleep and with little food for the past days, Layla was tired and in distress. She'd rock her body forwards and backwards. I spent the better amount of three hours next to her. She kept asking whether I remembered how we had danced together the night before her brother died, and whether I had any brothers and sisters.*

People sat silently, maybe quietly wiping up some stray tears, or talking in low voices and small sentences to the person next to them. The physical geography of what was a spacious living room was completely transformed: black-dressed women sitting on couches and on chairs covered the walls. The women sat and a loud stillness sat with them: few words and sobs cross-cutting the room, vocal and mostly wordless

presences. Contrary to the Arabic customs of hospitality, there were no offerings to guests. Neither drink nor food existed in the sitting room – if someone wanted a drink or a snack they discretely went to the kitchen or asked a child to bring them some water. It was like sitting and waiting for tiredness to wear the body out, for pain and for realisation to come.

[9 April 2009] *'These were not song s. . . well, not exactly. They are stories* (qiṣaṣ) *. . . famous and old, religious, mythological,' replied Umm Nidal on our way back from the mortuary house near midnight. When we arrived the living room was filled with black-dressed women. Somewhere in the middle of the room, a woman in her 70s with henna-dyed red hair would sing a stanza and then the rest of the women would repeat in unison. I couldn't understand much of what was said, but it lasted around 15 minutes and most of those present participated in the singing. Some women were crying, whilst Layla was rocking her body, as if she was part of an ecstatic* dhikhr *performance. Umm Nidal summarised the story for me:*

> *A well-known, much respected family engages their only son; but he dies the day before his wedding – he dies we don't know why . . . from natural causes . . . Someone tells the departed's bride-to-be to take a big platter and to fill it up with food from a house where sadness has not entered. She searches and searches and visits all the houses in the village, and none is happy. Finally she goes to the house of her groom-to-be, sees the family distressed but no one tells her why. So, she goes and cooks the food herself.*

'The point is to lessen the pain (takhafīf al-ḥazin) *through stories that show that everything that happens is God's wish,' added Umm Nidal. [. . .] To me though, the story spoke of the irony and its necessity: to keep the bride-(not)-to-be happy, and thus ignorant, in order that the ritual obligation is properly fulfilled. Does pain make a beloved one unable to cook or does it contaminate food?*

The house was full with people, 45 that I could count. The large living space was filled with mostly middle-aged and older women, the small apartment kitchen was filled with people of a younger age: the deceased's teenage children, their peers, and their cousins. I was invited into the kitchen where conversations and curiosities run high. [...] As Umm Nidal remarked: 'Old people go in the morning. Young girls like Mona and you

> *come in the evening.'*
>
> *Descending out of the kitchen and into the living room many of the women had left, the circle now was more familiar, more intimate. Layla was resting with her legs on a couch, other relatives were sitting cross-legged. Tiredness and with it some calmness had started settling in, and conversations were brief and unrelated to death. 'And what can we do? Life goes on,' said Umm Nidal.*
>
> *It was around 10.30pm when the men (brothers, brothers-in-law and cousins of the deceased) arrived. The men were receiving condolences in a neighbours' house near by. They brought platters of food, the women quickly set the table whilst the last visitors excused themselves amidst invitations to join. Roasted rolls of minced meat with tomatoes, roasted chicken with vegetable, and different kinds of salads were laid on the table along with Arabic bread and plastic plates and cutlery. We sat down to eat, the food was delicious, but Latifah and Layla hardly ate some salad. What was left was stored in the fridge and some of it went into plastic bags for other relatives to take home. We left at midnight.*

The ceremonial visits defining *al-'usbū'* emphasise life over death, community over the individual, as in the story of the ignorant bride. The weekly visits shift the emphasis from the dead to the dead's living relatives, they provide through this rite of passage the liminal communitas (Turner 1995). This process of liminality and incorporation is done through the embodiment of both pain and community expressed in the almost constant physical presence of the surrounding other Druze bodies. Loss and community solidarity are simultaneously embodied by the mere presence of other people as well as through practices of sharing food and stories (*ḥaki qiṣaṣ*). The physical tiredness that results from the constant intersubjective interaction with others is perceived as an equivalent to exhausting emotional pain and thus preventing tiredness (*ta'ab*) in affecting the mind and sociality of those immediately affected. Furthermore, the social and religious emphasis on the deceased *per se* slowly transforms during the *usbu'a* to a social emphasis on the living, realigning the cosmological perspective of the parodic body and eternal soul with the existential presence of living social bodies. As such, the closure of the *usbu'a* ceremony does not signify the closure of the death ritual since neither events nor rituals are bounded entities, but their constant interpenetration.

Modernising al-'usbū'*: Local Politics in Jaramana*

> *'I heard that in the funeral of Faris*, bayt *Jamil, neighbours of my son's bride's family . . . well, they made the funeral seven days in the* mawqaf *but,* ya ḥarām, *people weren't going {did not visit}!' 'This is* ḥarām,' *another woman exclaimed, whilst a second one added that 'this not correct . . . when someone dies the whole country* (balad) *should attend!' 'Now in Suwayda it is only three days . . .' another woman added, some of the women nodded their heads and the polite discussion moved on.*

Since the early 2000s a public debate has been going on in Jaramana. The debate is about Druze mortuary practices and whether these should 'adapt' to modern times – an expression of which is the above discussion amongst middle-aged Druze women during an invitation for lunch from Umm Samir's neighbour in honour of her son who was getting married the same day, an interesting link to the continuity between wedding and funeral rituals.

As it is customary with debates, this one too has (at least) two main sides to it. One side of the debate, described by my informants in English as the 'traditionalists', is headed by the current *Shaykh al-balad* (the highest religious authority of the Druze in the suburb of Jaramana), and argues for the preservation of ritual practices. The other side of the debate, described as the 'modernists', argues for changing or altering some of the practices in order to accommodate the changing modern circumstances. The 'modernist' side is headed by a *Shaykh* who is both popular especially amongst the younger generations, as well as outspoken regarding Druze community and faith.

There are three main points of disagreement regarding the mortuary ritual between the 'traditionalist' and 'modernist' camps in Jaramana. These, namely, include: the duration; spatial arrangements; and closure of the mortuary ritual known as *al-'usbū'*. Specifically, the 'modernists' argue for a reduction in the duration of *usbu'a* from seven to three days of mourning, condolences and visits, whilst the 'traditionalists' argue for the preservation of the full seven-day duration. The 'modernists', allegedly 'more scientific', argue that in an industrial society people have to work for wages and live by different rhythms, and so a week off work is not only highly disruptive but a 'waste of time' and 'not modern': 'This shaykh says that we should not

change all our traditions but some in order to be more comfortable in our modern circumstances'.

The second point of disagreement addresses concerns over the place where condolences and visits should be held during the *usbu'a* ritual: in the *mawqaf* or in the deceased person's house. The 'traditionalists' argue that it should be optional for the immediate family to decide where condolences should be given, as long as certain customs, such as the segregation of women and men, are adhered to. The Shaykh of Jaramana has been reported to state that it is more 'respectable' for the deceased to hold the *usbu'a* in the house that he lived in – in fact, because the *shaykh* is a neighbour of Latifah, when her husband died she had to follow his advice on how and where to practice the *usbu'a*. However, the 'modernists' see the deceased's house as a symbolic maker of wealth, power, status, and arguing that in death everyone is equal, they state that everyone should share the same space – this is the *mawqaf*. To this argument they also note the 'modern' arrangement of apartment houses that do not lend themselves easily to the segregation of men and women (regarding houses, see Chapter 2).

The final disagreement is in regards to the time of ritual closure for the weekly mourning. The closure to the ritual traditionally comes during the morning/afternoon of the seventh day of mourning in which visitors give their condolences to the family of the departed. The modernists argue that this ritual visit should take place during the evening of the seventh day and not during the day, because of people's working commitments. Accommodating 'tradition', a practical notion of community and 'modernity' are concerns emblematic of life in Jaramana, as in most other places. Yet, many of my informants, ranging from teenagers to elders, take a dialectic view of this public debate, blurring and challenging crude dichotomies of 'traditional' and 'modern': they pragmatically pick-and-choose between the positions of the different camps, criticising politely both, and in the end abide by whatever they see fit. And whereas there are those who are more or less exclusively on one side of the camp, most, like our neighbours hint at problems through pointing out some, rather embarrassing, examples of what happens when community, religion and practice are not exactly coordinated. By pointing out situations that are not exactly 'right', they avoid direct criticism to any one camp, but through reaffirming some apparent 'fundamentals' such as communal reaction to death, they are

able to manoeuvre themselves between the different arguments, whilst simultaneously showing that 'fundamentals' as such, are always already and only contextual.

Umm Samir's polite contributions to the discussion in our neighbour's house are paradigmatic of the discrete but accurate diplomacy exercised as she only nodded or added '*ya ḥarām*' to statements that obviously were against a perceived Druze solidarity, such as the comment that people had not attended a deceased's funeral. When a neighbour mentioned that in Suwayda the ritual has been altered, Umm Samir's expression was polite but blank. In our private conversations Umm Samir had expressed at length her sincere admiration for the 'ancient' and 'beautiful' customs that the community has and she is quite adamant that there is no good reason for change. Furthermore, Umm Samir's husband is related to the Shaykh of Jaramana, being part of the *Shaykh*'s *bayt* (house), a *bayt* with a long, local genealogy and religious power, she is politically allied and related to the so-called 'traditionalists'. This does not mean necessarily that because people are related to a specific camp or family that they will be completely and unquestionably allied to all sides of the debate. For example, Tariq, Umm Samir's son, chooses to agree with some of the points of both camps: 'I think seven days is better because it is good for remembering the dead. I prefer *al-mawqaf* because it means equality for all people. I want the *usbu'a* in the morning because you should make the effort.'

At the same time, contemporary conflicts and debates are enmeshed within the historical, local political conflicts of the area. Many years ago, maybe 100 or 150 years ago – no one is able to say with precision – a big fight broke out in Jaramana between two powerful *bayt*s over which one will provide the *mukhtār* of the area. Rivalries broke out, killings took place, and the Druze peasants of the village became divided between these opposing fractions, which resulted in the village being divided in two and having two different *mukhtār*s. As years passed by, the conflict grew somewhat weaker, but only in the past 20 years have mixed marriages been publicly accepted (as an old lady put it '*ma biya'to ba'adon*' – they would not give/marry to each other). However, although this conflict is not anymore a source of friction within the Druze community in Jaramana, it still provides a backbone to social alliances, jokes and internal stereotyping.

Birthing in Jaramana

Having combined ethnographic description, fieldnotes and anthropological analyses, the above section has outlined the complex parameters regarding dying in contemporary Jaramana. The following section turns to 'birthing' in order to view how this too forms a contemporary arena of social and political struggles.

Announcing Pregnancy

Usually my conversations with Umm Samir took place in the midst of house errands and food preparation. Sometimes in the summer, the daily routine was more prone to change as we would often visit the houses of her two eldest sons, which stand side by side on the edge of the family's plot of land. In the early morning of 3 June 2009, Umm Samir told me over our morning tea that after Abu Samir returns from *barra*,[23] we would go to the farm (*bourieh*), slipping at the end of her sentence in a casual tone that Sarah and Lina, her daughters-in-law, were pregnant (*ḥaml*: pregnancy, *ḥāmel*: pregnant). With my excitement in stark contrast to Umm Samir's understatement, I asked how many months into their pregnancy the two women were, and was surprised to find out that they were into their fourth month. I didn't show it, but at the time I felt a particular anthropological rejection: taking into account that we lived at the same house and that sons and daughters-in-law visit at least once a week, why was I left out of sharing the happy news?

When we went to the *bourieh* (farm), I happily congratulated the two women, who received my wishes with a certain shyness and understatement. I was perplexed by their reactions but did not dare ask for a further explanation in fear that they might not want to discuss this with *me*.

Umm Samir spoke frequently about how her husband and her mother-in-law (*ḥamāta*) became very happy (*m'basat*) every time that she would announce a new pregnancy (*bijib walad*: to 'bring'/give birth to a child), but it wasn't until a year later,[24] that Umm Samir and I talked extensively on perceptions and practices pertaining to pregnancy. One of the first things that Umm Samir mentioned was that the pregnant woman firstly announces the pregnancy to her mother and then her mother-in-law (*ḥamāta*), showing the degree of proximity in social relations and hinting at the shared responsibility and support that will

develop between pregnant woman, offspring and grandmothers; this links different generations but also underscores the status change in the case of the pregnant woman. However, the announcement itself can happen anytime between the first and third months of pregnancy, and Umm Samir noted how the pregnant woman prefers to delay: '*balki biysīr shī*' (in case something happens). Uncertain in both medical and cosmological senses, delaying and understating the social significance of pregnancy for three months or more is perceived as creating a private space for the couple simultaneously connected to cultural idioms and prohibitions concerning the protection from evil spirit (*jinn*) and the 'evil eye' (*'ayn al-ajraq*). The announcement of pregnancy is in sharp contrast to the immediate and public announcement of death in Jaramana. And although birthing in Druze cosmology is an expression of the eternal soul, a manifestation of *taqamuṣ* (reincarnation) and a reaffirmation of the religio-ethnic community, on the level of practice it shares with the wider Arab held social ambivalence towards sexuality as polluting (Khuri 2001) and an impetus for the social control of women as a 'serious source of female moral inferiority [. . . because] pregnancy is itself incontrovertible evidence of sexual activity [. . . and] since fertility calls attention to their sexuality, women downplay it; they even try to keep pregnancies secret for as long as possible' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 132).

Prenatal Practices

The early stages of the pregnancy are of heightened significance for both the pregnant woman and the foetus. Women in Jaramana discuss these changes as both emotional and physical. Specifically, it is perceived that, approximately between the first and fifth month, the pregnant woman's personality changes (*taghayor nafsi*), simultaneously with changes in her body and appetite: she needs a lot of sleep, she wants to eat more fruits and drink milk, but she doesn't eat a lot. These psychosomatic changes provide for a liminal geography of changing and forming relations both between mother and child, as well as the social status of woman as a mother in Druze community. During this time, the pregnant women 'as pragmatic actors manoeuvring among various networks of power' (Kisch 2009: 729) utilise a combination of medical knowledge systems in order to get advice (*istisara*): monthly visits to the medical doctor, in combination with guidance and customs derived from older women, friends and neighbours. Up to approximately ten years ago, in Jaramana,

there existed a traditional midwife, *qabīla nisayyah* or *qabīla ʻarabiyyeh*.[25] This woman would provide folk (*shaʻabi*) healing advice to pregnant women and eventually would be the one to assist in childbirth. In the years prior to the spreading of social health and medicine, two such midwives would operate in the area of Jaramana; due to their profession they are frequently described as 'those who have given birth to all of Jaramana' (interview with the daughter of the late midwife).

The fifth month of the pregnancy is perceived as an important threshold for the transition of the pregnant woman into a mother: during this time the woman begins to 'feel' the movement (*ḥaraka*) of the child inside her, whilst physiological discomforts of the previous stage will most probably end, and she will become more comfortable (*tartāḥ*) and happy (*saʻīda*) for the upcoming birth. The change to motherhood is accompanied with changes in responsibility as well as social capital: '*al-bint toufakir bas bil-nafsa*' (the girl thinks only of herself) said Umm Samir, noting the change in personhood and social responsibility as well as status capital that comes with giving birth.

During the sixth and seventh months of pregnancy social relations between the pregnant woman, the unborn child, and the future father are forged through material connections and gifts: this is the time when father and mother-to-be begin making preparations for the arrival of the new family member, such as buying new clothes for the child (*shou bidi-jiblou al-walad*), new furniture for the baby and/or for the house (these are viewed as gifts of the husband to the mother of his child), as well as appropriate arrangements and provisions for the reception of guests that will flood the house after birth (special tea and sweets for treating guests). Material belongings as well as gift exchanges help forge social and material bonds between the couple, the child, and the wider social circle.

During the last stages of the pregnancy the workload of the woman in the household is significantly reduced through the cooperation between other female relatives residing either in the household or from the circle of extended family and friends.

*Birth (*wilāda*)*

Umm Samir frequently mentions with contained pride how she gave birth to all her children by herself in *bayt sheta* (kitchen and female sleeping area of Arabic house); her last birth took place in 1994.

Although birthing at one's home has empowering connotations of female strength (*al-nisoua al-'arabi qaoui*, Arab women are strong, informant's comment), women's opinions in Jaramana are complex and divided on the question of where and under what system of knowledge the birth should take place: some consider the hospital safer and cleaner (*anḍaf*) since blood and bodily fluids are handled and disposed of outside of the home, whilst others express fears of being 'cut' (referring to the Caesarean Section) and mention the lack of privacy.[26] Nevertheless, all of the women informants in Jaramana that have given birth in the past ten years have done so in the hospital.

The pregnant woman goes to the hospital accompanied by a small number of close relatives, usually her husband, her mother and her mother-in-law (*ḥamāta*).[27] Mother and relatives are said to welcome (*youstaqbalouna*) and bless (*moubārakouna*) the child upon its arrival into the world. Husband and relatives present the mother and newborn child with gifts (such as gold, clothes for the child, etc.) and exchange wishes such as '*alf mabrouk*' (congratulations), '*wouzhou khair aleina*' (his face is blessing for us) and to the mother specifically '*allah ykhaliki ili*' (may God give you strength). If there are no further complications in the mother's and child's health, then they all leave the hospital and return to the house on the second day of the birth. The days before and after the birth, the pregnant woman should try to walk – this is supposed to help in childbirth as well as in lactation.

Postpartum Practices: al-tabaqāt al-arba'īn

An Arabic proverb states that after birth the new mother's tomb remains open for 40 days (*al-qabr maftūḥ*).[28] During this dangerous period, *mala'ika* (angels) are said to surround the new mother and especially the newborn baby. The divine blessings of angels intermix with the doors of heaven and death, a metaphor that underlines the porous line between life and death and that underscores the physiological and social transformations from womanhood to motherhood and from unborn to born, during the uncertain time in which postpartum rituals and practices take place. During these 40 days, the new mother is called by the feminine descriptive noun *nafasa*. This is derived from the Arabic root verb n-f-s and incorporates diverse meanings such as 'to breathe' and 'to be precious'. During this time, the *nafasa* is confined to her husband's house, taken care of by relatives, and is encouraged to relax, 'breathe',

whilst she receives (or so is expected to receive) golden gifts from her husband and many social visits to her house. Also, *Nafs* in Druze cosmogony is envisioned as the passionate activity of God's Will and Thought (Makarem 1979 [1974]). The noun *nafs* means 'self' and in Islamic theology it refers to the self of a person, individual uniqueness, as well as to selfish and/or dangerous desires.[29] These 40 days signal the remaking of *nafasa*'s self, and the making of her offspring through prescriptions and taboos on what enters and surrounds their bodies. For the same porosity that defines the uncertainty between life and death, also defines the relationship between self and body, and body and society.

The 40-day period after birth, is called *al-tabaqāt al-arbaʿīn* (*tabaqāt* pl., *tabaqa* sing.), and is a period of tremendous uncertainty and ambiguity for the new mother and the offspring. Specific ritual practices, dietary adjustments, and care for the body of mother and child take place in these 40 days, which is a ritual customarily observed, with similarities and differences, within different communities in Syria and across Muslim communities. In Druze beliefs, births are perceived as always already rebirths of Druze souls into new 'clothes' (Bennett 2006; Khuri 2004). Thus, transition and transformations are not only physical or ritual practices but intrinsically connected to the Druze cosmos: the constant remaking in reincarnation of both *ʿAql*, *Nafs* and *al-Tali*. Furthermore, cosmological beliefs can only be substantiated through social practice and through society. The 40-day ritual confinement is a rite of passage that includes separation, liminality and incorporation and forms and re-forms a relationship between mother, offspring and society (van Gennep 1960). In this sense, the 40-day period could be conceptualised as the ritual that is a bounded event (postpartum) that underscores an unbounded processes (reproduction of society and reaffirmation of cosmological order).

Although ritual practices are penetrated by cosmological and religious beliefs, nevertheless postpartum practices in Jaramana embody the materiality of social relations and cosmological beliefs, since the relation between the mother, offspring and society is established and reinforced through material 'stuff' and practices: they are established on, by, and through the body. The 'body' as born, is capable of birth, life, death, the 'body' that lactates, that is bathed or not bathed, the body that is both agentive and passive, the transformative and transforming body, a body that is a field of possibilities, and the phenomenological horizon

of perceiving as well as being-in-the-world. *Al-tabaqāt al-arba'īn* are the stages that ritually thread the porosity of interrelations between 'stuff' that are at once material, cosmological and social substances: water, lochia, milk, blood.

During these 40 days, the *nafasa* and her newborn must stay at home in order to become well (*biyḍal bil-bayt, minshān yiḍal koweies*). This spatial confinement is explained in terms of lack of body strength (*ḍayf al-jism*), pollution taboos and relationality between offspring and *nafasa*. Pregnancy fluids that flow from the vagina are considered both socially polluting (*talawuth*) as well as threatening for the mother, as she is perceived to be prone and 'afraid of getting sick' (*tamraḍ*). Finally, an almost physical bond that persists after birth connecting mother and baby and its sudden breakage, such as if a mother leaves the confines of the house, is envisioned as directly affecting the offspring (*athar bil-wlād*), as well as in permitting air and producing gas in lactation.

The *nafasa* must eat food considered beneficial (*moufīdeh*) such as: warm drinks, milk (*ḥalīb*), sesame paste (*ḥalāweh*), all kinds of meat (*laham*, from the second day of childbirth, chicken liver, *sawdet djej*), garlic (*thūm*), potatoes (*baṭaṭa*), and drink plenty of a tea especially served for childbirth. This tea, *bakhrat ma jaws*, is made with cinnamon, cloves, ginger and *khoulounjan*; these ingredients are boiled together and served with sugar and walnuts in a ball to the new mother as well as to the guests.[30] She must stay in to welcome the guests (*youqābil al-duyūf*). Both tea and food aid in the elimination of fluids, and the strengthening of the *nafasa*'s body and subsequently enriching the lactation milk. These substances help in the process of lactation '*bi-tjib al-ḥalīb, traḍa'a*' (to bring the milk), and '*ta'ati samāga*' ([for the milk] to be full, strong); lactation is not only a physical necessity between *nafasa* and offspring, but an affection into the future of her offspring since milk from lactation will protect the child from imminent danger (*khaṭar*) as well as from all future sicknesses (*min kul al-amrāḍ*).

Furthermore, during these days, the *nafasa* abstains from activities in which potentially dangerous substances may enter her body, such as sexual intercourse and bathing; at the same time, the baby's body undergoes a series of different bathing regimes. A full-bodied bath of the mother is perceived to affect lactation because it makes the milk lighter (*bi-khafīf al-ḥalīb*) and to endanger the health of the newborn. Thus, with the exception of dry-baths, bathing after birth is strictly

prohibited, and depending on personal choice, the *nafasa* will have a bath between one week to 25 days after giving birth. Although bathing will continue to affect lactation up to approximately six months, and thus women try to take baths as infrequently as they can, on the fortieth day the ritual re-incorporation of the *nafasa* is denoted primarily through a big celebratory bath (*ḥammām*) that would, in the past, take place at the local public bath (*ḥammām al-balad*). During this bath, the new mother is ceremonially washed by her mother-in-law (*ḥamāta*) and other close female relatives, and her body would be massaged with olive oil. This marks her own ritual rebirth and return to fertility, the passage from *nafasa* to mother as well as to wife, and this passage is symbolically made possible through the incorporation of the *nafasa* through her *ḥamāta*. The day continues with the new mother paying short visits to relatives' houses, a brief visit to the *mijlis* or other site of religious/spiritual activity, and, during my fieldwork, a walk to the high street shops of Jaramana. Although younger generations do not emphasise or designate the incorporation ritual of the fortieth day, many informants noted that in the evening the relatives of the new mother would simulate a party 'like that on the day of her wedding' (*mitle ka'an iyām 'ursa*).

The proverb of the *nafasa*'s tomb remaining open for 40 days is a metonymic contiguity for the postpartum vagina that remains open and excretes lochia in that time frame, and which associates the *nafasa* in an uncertain position between life and death. In this instance, the vagina is simultaneously the blessed threshold through which the foetus passed into social life, as well as a vulnerable, polluted (*talawuth*) and life-threatening wound that through excessive bleeding or potential infection may cost the life (and milk) of the new mother. As such, the vagina is socially constructed as a porous spatial-temporal dimension that through it, life passes but also life is taken. This permeable relationship of the vagina with life and death through the porosity of tomb and womb acts as the synecdochic metaphor for *nafasa*'s whole body.

Through both spatial confinement, and regulation of substances that enter and leave the body (such as food, drink, lactation and bathing water) a relation is established between liquids that permeate the body: the body's relations with its surrounding becomes fluid and potentially dangerous, whilst the materiality of both *nafasa*'s and the offspring's bodies emerge as fields of a diverse range of potentialities.

Offspring Postnatal Care and Practices

The newborn is bathed and dressed with new clothes at least once per day for the first few months (*bi-ḥammamou kul iyawm, w bi-ghayiarlou malabisou*). Contrary to the mother who must avoid bathing for at least 40 days, the newborn is bathed every night for the first week in warm salted (*māleḥ*) water, as a health protection. During the second to the fifth week since birth, the body of the baby is massaged with olive oil (*zeit al-zeitūn*) before the night sleep; this is in order to provide the baby's skin with elasticity and beauty. During the same time-frame, white *kohl*, a Middle Eastern eye cosmetic, is applied to the eyes of the baby; this is thought to benefit vision and protect against eye-related diseases.[31] After the second week, the offspring is bathed in perfumed water with a mixture of herbal flowers (*juḥrat*), this is said to consolidate a 'pure' skin and to make body odours such as odours of sweat and mouth to smell like flowers.

Ṭohūr: *Male Circumcision and the Prelude to Marriage*

After the first week of birth, the male offspring undergoes circumcision (*ṭohūr*). The actual operation happens in a hospital, but years ago it would be performed by a special person and there would have been a family celebration: '*mitle ḥafleh al-'urs*' similar to a wedding party. In this celebration, relatives and friends gather in the male offspring's house and are treated to non-alcoholic drinks (*sharāb*) and sweets (*ḥelow*). The baby is dressed into two or more new changes of clothes, and the celebration is considered a small predecessor for his future wedding (*uqbal 'ursou*). Interestingly, this act is celebrated precisely because it resembles the nuptial union (Chapter 4) rather than the sexual union, whereas in general pregnancy is related more to sexuality and downplayed. Depending on the family and the scale of celebrations, there are ululations (*zaglouta*), dancing (*raqs*), and *tarwuediah* (similar to women's ululations but for men). Contrary to the Syrian Muslim practices of circumcision, this event is not considered a religious ceremony, and there is no religious authority or *shaykh* present (also see Khuri 2004); similarly to other places were circumcision is practised, *ṭohūr* is considered a health-related necessity that protects from disease (*aḥsan lil-sāḥa*) and is viewed as 'cleaner' (*anḍaf*). Gifts to mother and baby are exchanged within the nuclear family, especially from the father and his family expressing love and respect (*mouhtam fihon*), usually in the form of

gold presents (*qataat ḍaḥab*). Flows of relationships through gift-giving are also circulated between the family and the wider social neighbourhood in Jaramana, initiating the offspring into the relational exchanges of belonging and becoming Druze.

Conclusion: Life-Cycle Transformations and the Embodied Struggles of Druze Becomings

On the occasions that Umm Samir and I would take an evening stroll in the busy streets of al-Khudr and al-‘Alam, she would greet and introduce me to people who were relatives (*qarāyeb*) or family (*‘āyleh*). Then, I might have asked what relatives these are, and Umm Samir would have provided for me a longer or shorter genealogy (usually longer such as distant cousins or consanguine relatives). Sometimes she would just laugh and reply ‘*kulna qarāyeb hounīk*’ (we are all relatives here, similar to ‘we are all born in each others’ houses’ Oppenheimer [1980]). Umm Samir’s answer, not unusual, is not only based on actual or perceived kinship relations, but on kinship as a mode of relating encompassing complex narratives informed by Druze cosmological beliefs and religious conducts, as well as with ritual practices that connect, form and embody historical, socio-political and local relations within the contours of life-cycle transformation in the contemporary Druze community of Jaramana. The religious kinship that connects all the Druze, and separates them from other Syrian communities based on the beliefs of reincarnation, is transformed on the ground as a form of religious-based ethnicity. Familial metaphors, such as ‘we are born in each other’s houses’ (Khuri 2004), become ritual embodied transformations that bind religion as a form of ethnic identity, in which the notion of ethnic ‘blood’ is substituted with the Druze reincarnated eternal soul.

As the human soul is cosmologically involved in the continuous and eternal struggles of perfection and union with the divine, so does the human body become the embattled territory of ritual transformations that mark its beginnings and endings. These ritual marks are parodic, of course, but mark the body through embedding it in the religious and social geographies of being a Druze (Khuri 2004) and also of becoming in Jaramana. These beginnings and endings, birthing and dying, are both dynamic, never-ending processes as well as local and contingent upon the specific contextualities of life in Jaramana. Unbounded and

never final, birthing and dying in Jaramana are transformations – the necessary embodiments of the soul in religious metaphysics and the dialectic and intersubjective 'binding' of the body within the socio-political contexts of a minority community in the periphery of Damascus, and a minority ethno-religion within the wider contexts of Syria and the Levant. From the centre of cosmological Druze beliefs to the peripheries of the contemporary Druze polity, these ritual transformations socially construct and politically mark the body as the site par excellence of fragmented and continuous embodiments, of political, religious, social and historical transformative struggles.

CHAPTER 4

MARRIAGE AND POLITICS IN JARAMANA

Zahra's Story: Repercussions for a Non-Endogamous Marriage

I grew up in a middle-class intellectual family. My parents are intellectual in different ways, but somehow in a complementary way. Although both of them are teachers of history and they come from the same [extended] family, they are very different in dealing with children, money, politics and society. Both of them don't care for religion very much. They are simply secular or not religious. My father is hooked on politics. He used to criticise our dictator and autocratic political regime, but also our religion 'the Druze' and the religious people. He considers this as being backward. [. . .] However, my father was not happy to see his daughters going out, dressing in short skirts or be involved with liberal intellectual groups. When he had the power and I was dependent – mostly economically – he refused my request to study music. The reason was clear: he disliked seeing his daughter getting in contact with and being a part of one of the rare open and mixed communities in Damascus. Otherwise, he encouraged my interaction with his own intellectual group. In short, I was allowed to be intellectual under his control. [. . .] My mother is a smart, elegant, dynamic and modern woman. She supported me to dress in short skirts, to learn music and to keep going out far away from my father's control.

> More importantly, she helped me to come to Europe. She learned to benefit out of the corrupt system in order to get her rights and the rights of her children. [. . .] She fought to get comfortable household machines as a modern woman. She was very much interested in social issues and gender affairs. She is very much aware of disadvantages of women in Syrian society, in particular in our Druze society. My mother was a feminist until I became a feminist. Then she became a typical Druze mother, who wants to maintain the family pride and protect herself from social blame.
> (Zahra Ouward, email correspondence, 2010)

Zahra grew up in a secular, liberal household; she played the flute and the violin and had heard more of Marx, Nasser and Arab socialism than she had about Druze religious beliefs and practices. In fact, Zahra and her friends often complained that they knew nothing of Druze endogamy until they entered university. Besides, both Zahra's parents are stern believers in a secular and democratic civil society (*mujtama' madanī*), and they were active members of the pre-war secular opposition to Ba'th Party. However, as evident in Zahra's narration, to be intellectual comes with visible limits and boundaries, frontiers that may strike as dissimilar or disproportionate, from the will to decide how to dress to deciding what profession to follow in one's life. The common denominator to these boundaries is the *body*: its public visibility, its economic capacity, and the social networks it inhabits. The practice of traversing such boundaries was taught to Zahra by her own mother, who became her teacher and accomplice. But, Zahra broke the boundary, exposed her accomplice, and challenged openly the subtle hide-and-seek that historically contingent formations of collective identities, like the Druze 'sect', may accommodate.

The big challenge came shortly after I left fieldwork, in October 2009. Zahra by then had been away from Syria for almost a decade, and she had invited her parents for a visit to Europe. When they came, Zahra introduced them to her European husband-to-be and he asked them permission to marry their daughter. 'You are free to do as you please, Zahra, but if you marry this man you will no longer be part of *this* family' were the words of her father, recounted to me by Zahra. And this is what happened, as, with the exception of her two younger siblings, Zahra's relationships with parents and older brother have been

devastated ever since. The five years that have elapsed have seen the eruption of war in Syria, Zahra's political involvement with the secular expatriate opposition, the birth of her two children, and the brief incarceration of her father, Farid, by the regime. Zahra made the necessary arrangements for her parents to leave the war in Syria and to come live with her – they refused. None of Zahra's actions have mellowed their stance. Particularly Najwa, her mother, is deeply affected: she is the one who suffers the most and her saturated bitterness and sense of betrayal have resulted in a serious protracted depression. It is Najwa that has to put up with gossip in the neighbourhood, her husband's and son's judgement, and she is the one who has to shoulder the 'blame' for the conduct of her daughter is regarded a mother's responsibility. To this day, Zahra's marriage remains the 'dark' secret of the family.

How could her mother change seemingly overnight from a 'feminist' to a 'typical Druze mother'? Is Zahra's parents' rejection of her marriage revealing of the discursive limits of 'shallow' middle-class intellectualism? Is their reaction, their double standards, so to speak, an example of cultural *disemia*, 'the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection' (Herzfeld 2005: 14), in this case publicly exhaling civil society and decrying religious 'backwardness' but nevertheless recognising and abiding by these very same 'backward' religious boundaries? Or, could Najwa's reaction be the expression of a deeper cultural modality through which marriage endogamy ensures that kinship relations are reproduced within familiar networks, with long genealogies, trust, and certainly not with strangers (*ajnabi*)?

Zahra's story is by no means exceptional, as it echoes many a story of youth rebelliousness often weaved through star-crossed love affairs in Jaramana and Damascus. Seemingly 'overnight' changes in parents' behaviour were typical occurrences iterated by informants, and in order to address them they have to be situated within the broad context of endogamy, marriage politics, and the politics between generations. Moreover, Zahra's story touches three important nodes regarding the politics of marriage in pre-war, urban Syria: first, the particular challenges of a secular, intellectual middle class vis-à-vis 'traditional' marriage practices; secondly, gendered and embodied family relations; and thirdly, the relevance of endogamy in sect formation and sect reification.

I have already situated Zahra's family within the milieu of local Syrian class politics in Chapter 2. This chapter provides an examination of marriage ideologies and practices amongst the Druze in Jaramana. First, it asks what 'marriage' may tell us about Druze ideas and ideals of personhood, specifically how the Druze values of equality, exclusivity and solidarity are embodied and constituted through the ritual and the idiom of marriage. Second, it considers the extent to which the ritual of marriage, as performative and historically contingent, serves to reify the Druze as a distinct 'sect', and hence how 'sect' itself is performative and situational. I use Herzfeld's concept of *cultural intimacy* to understand how 'sect' as an identity formation idiom is constructed as a 'permanent fixture', a rigid given of social interaction, and how ritual practices both reinforce and potentially defy this formation. Finally, I trace in detail the processes through which the 'sect' comes to be socially constructed by analysing the ways that sect normativity is realised through both affirmation as well as negation.

The Perfect Marriage: Sect and Ritual Normativity

'Fifty years ago, weddings were conducted mainly by way of the family (*tarīqa 'ā'iliyeh*),' Abu Samir said in an affirmative tone. It was the start of summer, late afternoon, and the electricity was cut, as part of daily electric blackouts that had become very much a routine. It was still very hot outside, so Abu Samir, Umm Samir and I sat in the cool shade of the family room, wondering when the electricity would return and along with it the television and the electric fans. The house was unusually quiet as the children and grandchildren had dispersed, leaving the three of us in the house. Summer is the wedding season in Syria, and Jaramana was actively partaking in an array of marriages, parties and celebrations. As it was a unique opportunity to have Umm and Abu Samir together and without interruptions, I decided to grasp the occasion and ask 'how was your wedding?' Marriage (*jawāz*) is an always unfolding, plural event that pigments the neighbourhood's lived practices and which forms a constant theme for discussion and participation. People, and more so women, talk about each other's wedding celebrations (*'urs*), gossip about the weddings of others, whilst children are socialised for adulthood through the idiom of marriage: young girls when dressed nicely are 'like brides' (*mitle al-'arūs*) and young boys are given

nicknames such as 'Abu Ali' (father of Ali). Abu Samir took the initiative and described to me how weddings in Jaramana *were supposed* to happen back in the old traditional ways. His and Umm Samir's responses did not answer my question. Based on local notions of shyness and respect that frame interpersonal relations in Jaramana, it would be inappropriate for a married couple to make a big deal out of their own wedding. Their responses were also addressed to a specific audience, the anthropologist who was conducting 'research'. In answering generally about the ritual practices of weddings, Abu and Umm Samir were answering to me, thinking and framing their narrative around what they thought would be useful to me. Furthermore, their narratives fluctuated between past and present, their wedding and the weddings of other people in the family and in the area. Although they did not answer my specific question (cf. Cowan 1990: 91–7), they did provide something equally valuable: a picture of a shared, but not necessarily uncontested, 'ideal' practice of how traditional Druze weddings should be, or used to be, or are. Below, I set out this shared 'puzzle' of the ritual infrastructure of the 'perfect' Druze wedding in Jaramana. The 'collage' that follows is based upon the initial conversation with Umm and Abu Samir, 'pieces' provided by them and other informants, as well as through video and photograph solicitation methods throughout fieldwork.

Initiating Premarital Negotiations

When the groom-to-be would find a prospective bride, maybe a cousin or a neighbour, he would express his interest to his mother, who would find out about the girl and her family through unofficial channels, or through arranging an unofficial visit to the prospective girl's household. The mother of the groom plays a pivotal role throughout the negotiations and ritual (Khuri 2004: 207). Should the prospective mothers-in-law as well as bride and groom agree upon the possibility of a future marriage, a more official pattern of visits would begin, resulting, if all goes well, in the engagement of the couple (*al-khṭoubeh*). This visit, unofficial as it is, saves face to both families if the girl is otherwise engaged.

Al-khṭoubeh*: The Engagement Process*

The engagement is usually a long process that results in the exchange of rings (*khatib*) between a prospective bride and groom. During this

process, which can last from a few weeks to a couple of years, the families and extended families of prospective bride (*'arūs*) and groom (*'arīs*) become involved through a complex pattern of visits, arrangements and negotiations.[1] The first phase of the *khṭoubeh* is the visit to the house of the future bride by the prospective groom's female relatives. The aim of the visit is for the two households to become better acquainted. The frequency of such visits depends on several factors, such as social and geographic distance between the two families. During a different visit by the male relatives of the groom, the official request to marriage takes place. The bride's father kindly replies to the marriage request that he will need some time in order to ask relatives, brothers and cousins of the bride, as well as the bride herself, for their consent to marriage.

The waiting time varies up to approximately a week. Both Umm and Abu Samir, and many other Druze interlocutors, took great care to note that Druze women, contrary to their Muslim counterparts, are equal to Druze men and the consent of the bride must be explicit (but see Azzam 2007). The father of the bride-to-be then replies to the father of the groom: '*tawakalna 'ala allah, idha allah 'ataka nahnou 'ateināk*' (we will give her, God willing). With this sentence the engagement becomes official (*sārat makhtoubeh*), and the two families begin the preparations for the religious and social sanctioning and the celebration of the marriage.

Engagement Celebration

The groom's family is responsible for letting relatives and neighbours know when the engagement will take place. Druze engagements often combine the religious sanctioning of the future marriage with the social celebration. On the day of the celebration, male guests of both families arrive at the groom's house and they are greeted (*istiqbāl*) by the immediate and high-ranking elders or *shaykh*s of the family. Females usually meet at the house of the bride. Religious *shaykh*s meet in a separate room (where only initiates are allowed) and bless the golden rings that the couple will exchange. Then, the oldest or highest ranking *shaykh*, stands in front of the gathered male guests, and reads the *fātiḥa* from the Qur'ān (known as *qirā'at al-fātiḥa wa katabat al-kitāb*, 'to read the *fātiḥa* and write the book/sign the contract'), and the guests repeat it after him. This religious blessing of the engagement is a binding socio-religious contract, and those present exchange congratulations and wishes. When the religious endorsement is over, the guests are treated to

sweets and bitter Arabic coffee (*qahwa murrah*) by the groom's family. Abu Samir mentioned that in previous years the elders of the two families would kiss each other's large moustaches (*bosa shawārib* – Druze men were known to have long moustaches), to denote closeness and honourable commitment to each other, a potent physical symbol that would be 'more important than a [legal] contract' ('*aham min 'aqd* !').[2]

The celebration then moves to the bridal house, where the bride's celebration takes place (*sahrat al-'arūs*) in a parade formation with musical instruments, singing, and dancing sometimes accompanied by a show of arms, such as swords and pistols. Whilst the Druze of Suwayda usually sing and dance *jawifiyyah* (see Hood 2007: 46–49), the Druze inhabitants of Jaramana distinguish themselves by the musical genre of *'arada*. The female relatives of the groom await for the parade to arrive in front of the bride's house and welcome them with loud welcome rhyming calls and songs that are generically called *'āwīha* (this is the sound that the women make in front of each stanza), whilst other female guests sing women's songs specific to the occasion (*aghāni nisowān*). The bride and groom greet each other and enter the space (a sitting room or a courtyard) in which the evening party will take place, and they sit in specially embellished throne-chairs. Just before they take their places the gathered crowd sings to them *'arada* (*bi-zifouhon ma 'arada*).

The engaged couple remain standing whilst the mother of the groom brings a large tray (*ṣaniyya*) in which the two golden rings amongst other golden gifts for the bride (earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc.) are placed. The mother of the groom dances with the tray in her hands and then she passes the tray to other members of the groom's family and friends. Finally, the tray reaches the bride and groom and they present one another the two engagement rings whilst the crowd claps, and the women ululate (*zaglouta*). Then, the groom's family passes, greets and dresses the bride with gold; similarly the bride's family place gold on the groom (*bi-labisouon ḍaḥab*). All the guests will then stand in a queue and will personally greet and congratulate the bride and groom.

When all the greetings have been exchanged, the groom and the male guests leave the house of the bride and continue the celebration elsewhere, with more music, songs, dances and food. The bride and female guests will stay to celebrate at the bride's house, where the bride will be the first to dance in front of and for her guests.

The variability of the ritual order depends on how close the two families are, how competitive or religious (if a *shaykh*, *shaykha* or their offspring is getting married there is less singing and dancing), as well as if this is the first wedding of the couple. Also, the ritual is different for the Druze of Suwayda or for mixed marriages between Jaramana and Suwayda. For example, in Suwayda the party (*sahra*) at the end of the night is gender mixed (*mouhlatat*) whilst in Jaramana it is segregated. Such differences in ritual often take the claims to either a firmer identity of Druzeness and autonomy, as in the case of Suwayda, or a more metropolitan, urban Damascene[3] heritage, in the case of Jaramana.

Marriage Transactions

Much has been written about wedding transactions and exchanges such as bride-price and dowry in the Middle East (Goody 1990). The most instructive and relevant analysis of people, goods and transactions comes from Mundy (1995). Mundy argues that property exchanges and transactions, such as those occurring during weddings, have either been linked to structuralist segmentation analyses of social organisation, or have been ignored altogether: 'the problem of differentiation in time, space and class has not been at the core of studies of Arab kinship' (Mundy 1995: 124). Using different case studies from her ethnography in rural Yemen, Mundy paints a picture in which class, status and historical circumstance internally differentiate the village households, their marriages and their transactions: 'marriage is far from a merely secondary alliance, a shuffling exchange of women between men who make society; marriage is itself structuring, or so at least it is among those with property' (Mundy 1995: 125). Mundy distinguishes amongst three kinds of payment that take place during a marriage: cost of wedding celebrations; a payment from the groom or his family to the bride's guardian called *shart*, and the endowment of the bride, *mahr* (Mundy 1995: 131–2). Mundy shows that these payments are highly relative to the social and economic status of the families and individuals involved.

In Jaramana, the topic of payments per se is a taboo subject and is seldom openly discussed; in fact, many informants from a variety of ages and social groups mentioned that these are not important for the Druze – this was often mentioned in opposition to Sunni Muslims of Damascus – because there is equality not only between genders but also

as a community of believers. However, practically, during the process of engagement and marriage, at least three types of payment may be identified. The first is called *mahr* or *moqadam* and is a transaction from the groom and his household to the household of the bride, discussed before the *khtoubeh* celebration and paid in full before the wedding. Part of this payment, which may not be in cash, may go to compensate the bride's family, another part may go towards wedding preparation, whilst a third part of it is agreed to be given to the bride in the case of a divorce. The second type of transaction is the *jihāz* (from *jahaza:* to make ready), and is the bridal trousseau comprising household furniture, furnishings, as well as clothes and jewellery, that the bride will take to her new house, and which belong to her. The third type of major transaction consists of the gifts that the new affinal unit receive from their relatives, extended families and wedding guests. These gifts are usually given to the new couple in the last days of their wedding ritual and may include cash, gold jewellery, as well as expendable goods such as rice and sugar.

There are two crucial factors that affect the aforementioned marriage transactions in Jaramana. The first has to do with internal differentiation within Druze families in terms of class, wealth and status. Poorer families are not able to have the same expenses as wealthier families, whilst 'middle-class' families may choose to abide by a different mode of distinction and consumption than 'traditional' families.[4] The second is the religious and political authority of the *shaykh*s. In the context of religious esoteric interpretation and the relative absence of public jurisprudence (such as in *Shari'a*), the Shaykh of Jaramana (called *shaykh al-balad*) has the authority to prescribe whether and how much a family should spend on marriage transactions. The *shaykh* also has the final say in granting divorce and in deciding property and inheritance rights after divorce. Thus, differences not only exist between Druze communities in different regions, but also emerge in historical succession to different *shaykh*s. Thus, marriage transactions are generally understated in Druze Jaramana as a difference of equality between them and their Muslim neighbours, and at the same time they reflect not only local but religious politics and alliances.

The Wedding Week

The arrangement of the wedding is primarily the responsibility of the family of the groom. However, it is a largely social activity in which

relatives, friends and neighbours participate. Formally, the wedding ritual lasts for seven days, although in many respects, it is an unbounded event that bleeds into everyday life. The following is a description of each of the days.

Day 1: *Jama'iyya 'āylat al-'arīs*

The family and close relatives and friends of the groom meet in the groom's house to form an 'organising committee' (*jama'iyya*) in order to arrange the wedding celebration. This committee is responsible for inviting guests, and all religious and social arrangements, venues, food, clothes and other necessities. Weddings are typically large communal affairs that include at least 200 invitees. This occasion also initiates the week-long celebrations by way of a dinner at the groom's household.

Day 2: *'Biyjnou al-'ajīn wa bisharou assabiyyah!'*

'They make the dough and the girls celebrate!' Umm Samir noted regarding the second day, a day of celebration and preparation by the female members of the groom's household. Preparation includes making bread and food, only the older women actually do the baking whilst the younger ones, especially the children, dance, sing and ululate (*zaglouta*).[5] At the end of the gathering, each household leaves with a bucket of dough from which they make bread in their own homes at night (in the traditional round oven, *tanūr*). In the house of the bride, the bride and her close relatives and friends make the preparations for the clothes, furniture and soft furnishings that she will take to her new home.

Day 3: *Jihāz* parade

The bride's trousseau is transferred from her natal to her nuptial house through a public parade consisting of her close and/or high-status relatives. Members of the groom's family are also present, but neither the bride nor the groom attends the parade. Singing and dancing takes place in the streets, mainly by the groom's family, and the nuptial house/apartment is arranged.

Food preparation and celebrations continue in the groom's house where the bread that was baked on the previous day is brought back to groom's house, and female relatives and friends start preparing the *kubbeh*, a delicious and time-consuming dish that is served before and during the wedding.[6]

Day 4: *ḥammām al-balad*

Jaramana has one public bath (*ḥammām al-balad*), and on the fourth day of the wedding week the bride used to go to the *ḥammām* along with her female relatives and close friends, as well as occasionally with the females from the groom's family in order to be washed and prepared. The bride would be cleansed, her hair combed, incensed with aromatic herbs (*bakhūr*) as protection against evil spirits, and henna applied on her hands. The women would celebrate, eat, sing and dance until the early evening. Now, this ritual cleansing more often takes place at the bride's house within the intimate circle of female relatives and friends.

The ritual of the ceremonial bath is a part of most Syrian weddings; in Damascene Muslim weddings, the groom and his male relatives would go to the *ḥammām* in the morning, whilst the bride and her relatives would go in the evening. Visiting the *ḥammām* is considered a jovial experience (see Tergeman 1994: 12, 59–60). As the public bathhouses have become less fashionable (and more touristic) in past decades, in Jaramana the bride has the 'day of the bath' in the vicinity of her own house. The public bathhouse is only still used for the groom, who has his bath on the morning of the wedding day.

Day 5: *sahrat al-'arūs wa al-'arīs*

Two separate pre-wedding celebrations are occasioned for the bride and for the groom. These celebrations are gender segregated,[7] so that in the bridal celebration female relatives and friends of both houses attend, and the same holds for the groom's celebration. The two social occasions may take place in the respective houses of the couple, or at specifically designated spaces for wedding receptions (*salat al-'urs*). Many guests are invited to each celebration, where dinner (*'ashā'*) and accompanying sweets are paid for by the bride's family as a farewell gift to their daughter. In the bride's party, the bride sits on a special throne-like seat, whilst chairs are set around and back from the space leaving an empty space in the middle for dancing. The bride welcomes guests by slowly dancing around the seated guests, as does the groom's mother. Usually before dinner is served, the groom comes, along with some male relatives of the bride (father and brother), to make a brief appearance at the party before leaving again. Throughout the duration of the bridal party, the bride will change into many evening dresses (from three to seven according to status), these are the dresses of her

trousseau that have been specially made for the occasion of her marriage and that have not been worn before. Every time the bride changes her dress, she has to dance around her guests. The guests also dance, usually following the lead of the groom's mother, who participates enthusiastically. At the end of the evening the bride will wear the final dress: her white bridal dress. This dress usually is the Western dress rather than the 'traditional' Druze wedding garment (called *libs 'arabī*, see Hood 2007: 98–9). This is an emotional time for the bride, her family and friends and many tears are shed. The groom's mother and relatives will eventually leave, leaving the bride and her closest relatives and friends to celebrate more intimately, and they will return to the groom's party. They invite everyone to the wedding by saying '*al-khamīs bil balad*' (lit. on Thursday in the area, even though the wedding does not necessarily happen on a Thursday). At the groom's party there is also singing (*'arada, zajel*) and dancing (*dabkeh*) and it is traditional to serve *kubbeh al-'arīs*: *kubbeh* of the groom, made with the home-made Arabic bread (*khobz 'arabī*).



Figure 4.1 A bride during the party the day before her wedding. Photograph by the author.

Day 6: *yawm al-'urs*

1. *ḥammām al-'arīs*, Groom's bath: Whilst the bride is being prepared and dressed in her house, the groom and his close male relatives and friends parade through Jaramana holding his nuptial clothes on large trays that are danced around by men. The groom either goes to the public bathhouse or to the house of a close relative or friend in order to be washed and dressed for his wedding. The men's parade sings and dances with *'arada*, occasionally firing guns, whilst women of the household where the ritual *ḥammām* does take place recite *'āwīha*. During the bathing and dressing of the groom, the groom becomes the butt of jokes, and is subject to playful beating by his close male friends, a process in the ritual resembling the structural ritual reversal of roles. The male parade is then served a big lunch.

2. Wedding contracts: For a wedding to be official vis-à-vis both the state and the Druze religious authorities, there are two religious contracts (sing. *'aqd*) that must be fulfilled. The first is the official, governmental registration of the marriage in the Muslim religious court,



Figure 4.2 The groom's male friends sing and dance holding his wedding suit before he gets dressed for the day of his wedding. Photograph by the author.

this contract is known locally as '*katb kitāb*' (the writing of the book), or as *kitāb al-maḥkameh* (official writing), and may take place anytime from the *khṭoubeh* until after the marriage. The second contract, is the Druze religious contract known as *'aqad al-'aqd* (contracting the contract), conducted by two or more Druze *shaykh*s on the day of the engagement, and anytime before the marriage. Both contracts need two witnesses from each side as well as oral permission from bride and groom.

The religious contract takes place after the groom's bath, usually at the groom's house or, if the house of the bride is far away, at a space adjacent to the bride's house.[8] The bride and groom's male relatives greet the guests that arrive and welcome them with bitter Arabic coffee (*qahwa murrah*). When everybody has arrived and the groom is welcomed with *'arada*, the religious *shaykh*s conduct a ceremony behind closed doors in which they recite religious texts and bless the wedding rings. Then a *shaykh* will come out and address the groom and the gathered guests, informing the crowd '*al-kitāb maktoub*' (the writing/contract has be written), and he along with the audience will recite the *fātiḥa* invocation from the Qur'ān. Some guests may want to make impromptu short poetic speeches and clapping, congratulations, songs and dances soon erupt. Usually the songs sung come from traditional Druze genres of men's songs with themes of nationalism and bravery (Hood 2007: 40–62). The house of the groom offers sweets to its guests and as the excitement increases, they prepare to parade to the bride's natal home.

3. *jaybet al-'arūs*, Bringing the bride: The groom's female relatives go to the bride's natal house where the bride and her female relatives await them. '*jīnā wa jīnā wa jīnā, jibna al-'arūs wa jīnā*' (we came, we came, to bring the bride we came), sing the groom's female parade as they approach and also later when they will leave the house of the bride. The parade is headed by the groom's mother, followed by women with musical instruments (most often a *darbakeh*), whilst everybody is singing, ululating, clapping and performing *'āwīha.*[9] The groom's parade arrives in order to take (*ya'khodha*) and bring the bride (*yjibou al-'arūs*) to the groom's house. The parade forms a chorus outside the bride's house and waits to be greeted with competing *'āwīha*s from the bride's female guests. There is a stark contrast between the two groups of women, a contrast that is established upon arrival and maintained well after the parade's departure with the bride. Leading the songs and

dances, the groom's mother greets the bride's group and enters the house with her group. Inside, she leads the songs and dances, inviting and luring the guests into participating, in what appears to be a structural reversal of hospitality norms. She and her group quite literally seem to take over, to conquer, the bride's natal house. The loud singing and extroverted dances of the groom's group are received and responded to with structurally equal but reversed 'loud' silences and tears from the bride and her family. Powerful movements and dances intertwine with equally potent controlled stillness, pain and seriousness. These contrasting performances form the liminal phase of the ritual signalling the pain of separation, for the side of the bride and her house, and the initiation of a new house member for the family of the groom. When the group of men have conducted the religious contract, they arrive at the bridal home. First, the cousins, brothers and father of the bride enter the women's space and kiss the bride farewell in an emotional outburst with tears and sobs. The bride, accompanied by her tearful parents and her jovial mother-in-law, walks out of the house, joining the male parade amidst the sounds of women's *'āwīha* and men's *'arada*.



Figure 4.3 The groom's mother dances in the centre of the room, in front of the bride. Photograph by the author.



Figure 4.4 The bride with her father and mother at the moment that she leaves the natal house. Photograph by the author.

4. As the bride and groom leave the bride's house, the guests sprinkle them with white rice. Relatives and friends of the bride stay behind, but a female friend or a sister may accompany the bride. The couple is led out of the bride's house and into the groom's by a male and female relative of the groom each holding a white candle. Just before the couple enter their new house, the bride and groom stamp out the light of the candles with their feet. The candles are thought to bring good luck. Also, just before entering the groom's house, the groom's mother passes to the bride a piece of dough, which the bride throws at the house's entrance (Hood 2007: 96). If the dough gets stuck on the wall then it is a good sign for prosperity and fertility. If the dough does not stick, the bride tries until successful.

5. *sahrat al-'urs*, Wedding celebration: The wedding celebration takes place in the groom's house, although it can also take place in a large restaurant or reception. The geography of the space is similar to the *khṭoubeh*, with two thrones colourfully embellished for the newly-weds. The guests queue to congratulate the couple and to give them gifts of either money or gold. It is usual that the father and mother of the groom



Figure 4.5 Wedding ululations. Photograph by the author.

are the first to kiss the couple and wish them well. The bride and groom then change their rings from their right to their left hands. Women ululate and sing, whilst male relatives start singing and dancing, usually performing *'arada* with sword dances. After a few dances, dinner is served, usually comprised of *mansaf*, a bulgar dish with nuts and lamb, or *uzi*, rice with peas and meat; both dishes are served with extra fat (*samneh 'arabi*), which symbolises prosperity and is thought to increase stamina. Depending on religious status, class and the outlook of the families, there may or may not be alcohol. Live music or a DJ may be present and guests and couples dance together until late in the night when bride and groom retreat to their private room.

Day 7: *sabhieh*

The house of the bride's family invites the bride and groom and the bride's family for breakfast/lunch and they exchange gifts. The mothers of the bride and groom discretely find out if everything went according to plan during the 'night of entrance' (*leylet al-dukhla*). But in most resources from informants, (also see Westheimer and Sedan 2007: 85), there seems not to be a specific ritual to denote consummation of

marriage or any form of public acknowledgement. The subject of sex whether during the first night of wedlock, before or after it, is a taboo and is not discussed openly. I often heard from young women that Druze families are much more puritanical regarding matters of sex than their Muslim or Christian counterparts in Syria, and usually spouses go into marriage with little prior knowledge or advice. I was not in a position to ask my 'adoptive parents' of either of the families directly on the subject, although I brought it to Najwa's attention in comparison to Sunni rituals, in which she mentioned that nothing similar happens in Druze weddings. The sensitivity of the subject is by itself an important marker of the significance of the nuptial rather than sexual emphasis in wedding practices.

A Moment of Ritual or, of Irony and Idols

The single, most dramatic moment of the wedding ritual process is the time where the groom's family 'claims' the bride from her natal home on the day of the wedding celebration (*sahrat al-'urs*). 'Bringing the bride' is a significant embodied and performative process of the ritual, relating previous and future processes of the marriage celebration to each other (for something similar in Cyprus, see Argyrou 1996). In this way, its name and practice designates a *moment of action*, which presupposes other actions, and leads to future ones. It is not a state in itself; it resembles the moment of passage.[10] As a dynamic process, this is also an example of gender performativity (Butler 1990). In this process of the ritual, gender roles, masculinities and femininities are constructed as an idiom of power relations in that they are not inherent individual characteristics but communally performed hierarchies of power: the groom's female group is communally performing a masculine show of power, whereas the bride's family and guests (including the male members of her family) communally enact a feminine performance. Thus, gender identity is not only 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 1990: 25), but is also an expression of gendered relations of power.

This ritual process is crucial in two ways. First, it is a clear instance of gender performativity whereby gender roles are assigned not on an individual basis but through collective formations. These formations are iterated through the antithetical roles that characterises the relationship

between the groom's group, on one hand, and the bride's group, on the other. The two groups are produced as opposites through gender performativity: the groom's group is performing a masculine show of conquest and triumph where the groom's mother is the most flamboyant expression of masculinity; on the other, the bride's group are performing and embodying effeminate sorrow, loss and defeat. Gender becomes an idiom of expressing and performing unequal power relations, as it is not an inherent characteristic found in individual bodies but a relationship between social groups. Secondly, this ritual phase establishes foundational oppositional categories that some to structure power relations, underscore the cultural significance of nuptial bodies. Two gendered groups are formed that operate collectively and agonistically; this relationship extends beyond the original participants and beyond the ritual of claiming the bride throughout the remaining of the wedding celebrations and encompassing all wedding participants.

Like in a football match, the guests are divided between the groom's team and the bride's. The agonistic performances of happiness and sorrow, the competitive dances and gift-giving maintain an obvious structural difference between the two groups. During the final wedding celebration, the bride and groom sit elevated and still on embellished thrones whilst their families and friends eat and dance in front of them. Their stillness emphasises that their nuptial bodies are reassembled onto the moving, gendered categories of their guests. Their bodies become located with the specific contours of hierarchical relationships that engender the solicited social reproduction. In Druze weddings, therefore, it only makes sense to speak about bodies that, through the nuptial ritual, become *extended* and *enlarged* in order to stretch and include, but not reduce or eliminate their differences. The irony is that these collective representations actually overshadow the protagonists by turning them into perverse idols. Instead of idols that are worshipped and blessed, bride and groom become perverse idols because they have to worship, pray to and be blessed by the society.

Herzfeld (2005) quotes the notion of 'cultural intimacy' to denote shared idiosyncrasies, ways of knowing, often awkward or embarrassing, that separate the cultural 'insider' from the outsider, noting that this kind of intimate knowledge is the 'stuff' that constructs and sustains nation states on the level of everyday practices. In a similar manner, in Jaramana's weddings the nuptial bodies are formed and reassembled



Figure 4.6 Preparations prior to a wedding party; the thrones of the bride and groom, luxurious in comparison to the guests' plastic chairs, are actually placed behind the chairs. Photograph by the author.

through relational performances that embody the structural, moral and ironic significance of the nuptial union, namely that bride and groom are the empty signifiers of social whims. Ironically, thus, the bodies of bride and groom are the least 'nuptial' during the wedding ceremony itself, where they sit still whilst nuptial relations are performed and reinforced around them.

Kholud's Somewhat Awkward Wedding

Kholud's wedding came as a surprise since she had gone past the 'prime' wedding age at least a decade and a half ago. Families like to see their girls married early in their 20s in Jaramana, but Kholud did not want to leave her grief-stricken mother, who had lost two of her sons tragically. Now she had agreed to marry this man from Suwayda, and there was a little relief mixed with conservative expectations, considering that the groom was not a relative or a neighbour but someone the family knew little about. The practical basis of endogamy in Jaramana quite often

corresponds to familiarity, since genealogical knowledge in marriage is precedent, social security and political strategy all in one (cf. Alamuddin and Starr 1980). Yet, Kholud's wedding was perceived as an anomaly in more than one way: her age, economic independence (since she was in charge of family business), lack of immediate male kin, ritual minimalism,[11] and village exogamy turned her celebrations, at times, into an embarrassment for the extended family who were otherwise scrupulously trying to maintain appearances vis-à-vis the neighbours and the guests from Suwayda.

Bridal parties (*sahrat al-'arūs*) are gender segregated and command large participation as prime opportunities for solidarity, commensality, dance, and, crucially, the showcasing of the bridal trousseau, especially the three to seven wedding dresses that the bride is expected to change into during the night. Kholud's bridal party took place at the *maḍāfa*[12] of her matrilineal cousin; it was not gender segregated, and perhaps because of miscommunication, it was not well attended. Due to the low turnout, Kholud's entrance was delayed, and her family was trying to call on friends, relatives and neighbours to come: 'Turn up the music so people know we're having a wedding here!' said the cousin. When Kholud came in, she was wearing jeans and a nice shirt rather than the elaborate *jihāz* dresses that brides-to-be usually wear. Because of the low turnout, Tariq whispered that 'we have to dance to fill the space'.

The wedding celebration was much better attended than the bridal party. But Kholud's bridal party night underlines the importance of who and how many attend a wedding. This is a matter of great interest as well as of great importance in Jaramana. Numbers and persons are reflective of family alliances, politics and status (Khuri 2004; Hood 2007); in Kholud's case she had come from an important religious family, but without the communication networks of a living father and brothers, she had to solely rely on the networks of her cousins, whilst, at the same time, her marriage was not as spectacular as most of the weddings in Jaramana. Kholud's uneasy and somewhat anxious bridal celebration underlines something that is an a priori to weddings in Jaramana: that they are social affairs and that large participation is needed. Specifically, the cousin's call to turn the music louder so that everybody knows and, hopefully, comes in to the party shows that rather than being a result of previous familiarity, marriage invitations are a means of maintaining but also of forging new relations between participants. There is an

expectation within the local Druze community, that even amongst strangers there is an obligation to participate in fellow Druze rituals (this is also true for funerals, see Hood 2007: 147).

But Kholud's wedding is far from being a situational anomaly that momentarily shutters social normativity and ritual order. This 'atypical' marriage – with the older bride, the foreign (*ajnabi*) groom, the humble dresses and ritual dances, the awkwardness of the guests, the embarrassing moments – was not simply the exception that proves the 'law' or that which reaffirms the ritual (dis)order. Contrary to Kholud's wedding being a negative foil to 'ideal' marriages, it indexes the precise moment in which Druze communal identity is formed and reified. Because of, not despite, its discrepancies, inconsistencies and embarrassments, Kholud's wedding is an instance in which communal self-recognition becomes markedly different to its self-presentation. Here the esteemed values of solidarity and brotherhood that constitute the Druze as a distinct tightly-knit social formation are recognised as lacking, as slightly incongruent. This incongruence does not make the wedding participants question the values that they recognise as *Druze*. On the contrary, such instances reaffirm communal solidarity and identity precisely because they are indications of a deep intimacy: by becoming accomplices in safeguarding the community's most valuable secrets, that they are not exactly as they say they are. The common secrets, the slight embarrassments, the self-deprecating jokes – it is all these that constitute an insider's knowledge, all these that are left out of the more pompous and righteous ways in which identity is performed to outsiders. This process reifies communal or national identity by turning the cultural insiders not to doctrinal evangelists but to willing accomplices: boundary formation premised upon sharing and keeping of intimate secrets: 'what happens here stays here'.

Kholud's wedding, then, is significant not because it is anomalous but because it laid out the boundaries of collective recognition versus collective representation. 'Embarrassment, rueful self-recognition: these are the key markers of what cultural intimacy is all about' writes Herzfeld (2005: 6) who argues that it is through cultural intimacy, the cultural discrepancies between self-presentation and self-recognition in forming and guarding identities, that bring into existence and reify social formations, such as national identities, in everyday life. Specifically, cultural intimacy is defined as:

> the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation. [. . .] the self-stereotypes that insiders express ostensibly at their own collective expense.
>
> (Herzfeld 2005: 3)

To make a wedding in Jaramana, thus, is to get everybody involved: preparations and celebrations presuppose the participation of a large number of people that will partake in the occasion. Relatives, but also neighbours and friends, are intrinsically involved not only during the celebrations of *khṭoubeh* and *'urs* but also during the food preparations, the *jihāz* parade, and the more private instances such as the washing and dressing of the bride and groom. Through these practices, attendees become the fellow accomplices in cultural intimacy, sharing the embarrassing incongruence between ideal and real whilst society is reassembled and re-formed at large ceremonially.

Sect Endogamy Reconsidered: Time, History, Politics

'We don't want strangers in our weddings,' declared Tariq's two oldest brothers and this settled the matter. Tariq had to retract and cancel the invitation that he had extended to his two new American friends for Kholud's wedding party. I happened to discuss the matter with the two brothers who explained that 'our weddings are neither for Americans nor for any other tourists [. . .] we are not a tourist attraction or a museum souvenir.' I was different, they said, because I come from Greece and we resemble (*tusbeh*)[13] each other, and because I am part of the family.

In the Druze marriages of Jaramana wedding guests not only participate but also embody the nuptial union through resembling, in space, the enlarged nuptial bodies of bride and groom. The 'Americans' would have been a structural anomaly, but this is not the main reason the brothers forced Tariq to cancel his invitation. On a time-space continuum the nuptial body emerges not only processually through the

ritual of marriage, but it demands specific regimes of knowing, of history, mythical and real. Essentially, the question of time and the nuptial body is a question on *Otherness* and difference (cf. Deleuze 1994; Heidegger 1985 [1962]). The temporal construction of communal nuptial bodies is a construction that challenges as well as reifies not only *other* bodies, but other bodies of *other* times: this 'Other' for the Druze is the historically, mythically and religiously performative state of emergency regarding a constantly threatening world-of-others as a sectarian minority. This is expressed structurally through endogamy and ritual through marriage ceremonies. The 'Americans', thus, were not allowed to attend because complete strangers or tourists would be a structural anomaly, an anomaly that by political and historical choice the two brothers chose not to involve.

Problematising Endogamy

We find ourselves in the large living room of *bayt* Ouward, Zahra's mother and I; it is August and the air-conditioning is on. Najwa has been having 'bad' dreams regarding Zahra; she is afraid she will not be coming back. Me, the bearer of secrets, because I know that Zahra is in a long-term relationship which soon will result in a sect exogamous marriage; and the mother who expects the inevitable to happen but cannot quite articulate it – as if she's trying to change the course of time with her denial.

> Maria: Umm Nidal [mother of Zahra], how would you say that people here view me?
> Umm Nidal: Oh, everybody likes you, Maria is like Fairouz [famous Lebanese singer] . . . You are very kind and polite (*m'rweh*), smart, strong . . .
> M: And how would you say they'd view me if I was the same person, with the same studies, family situation, but instead of Greek I was from here?
> UN: [Long, emotional pause] You know the answer to this. [Long pause] The society here . . . they would not see you with the same eyes.
> M: And you, how would you see me, Umm Nidal?
> UN: [Very long and emotional pause] I am part of my society.

If I were not Greek, then I would be in the situation of Zahra. So after a while, Umm Nidal told me a joke:

> There was a man fishing on the shore and he falls into the sea. He cannot swim and cries out for help. Passers-by gather at the shore and they all stand watching the drowning man, too afraid to jump in and save him. Somehow, a man is accidentally pushed into the water. He can swim, so he rescues the angler, and the hoard of onlookers applaud his brave act as he comes out of the sea. His reply? 'You may call me a hero, but I'm searching for the dog who pushed me into the water!'
>
> (Najwa, 16 August 2009)

Why is Zahra's marriage a problem for Najwa? First, because her daughter is marrying a stranger (*ajnabi*), someone they do not know and someone they cannot place within the existing networks:

> We like to see our children marrying close relatives for all these reasons: they are like us, they have the same interests as we do, we accept the fact that they are well brought up, and we know our children will be secure with them.
>
> (informant quoted in Rugh 1997: 131; Khuri 2004: 206)

Secondly, Najwa is worried because the prospective groom also does not know them: what kind of person could take a woman as his wife without knowing her family and her family history? These questions reflect back on both Najwa and Zahra, since 'society', whose membership Najwa does not and perhaps cannot question, will ask: what kind of mother brings up a child that prefers to go with strangers than to stay with her own; and what kind of daughter is she to leave her family and abandon her people? Based on Druze cosmology, Zahra's children will not be Druze, since Druze souls exclusively go to Druze bodies. And, if these concerns appear somewhat 'traditional', Najwa is tormented for an additional rather modern reason. As in the joke she shared, Najwa is an unintentional hero, an Aristotelean tragic heroine, because through her commitment in practices of education and gender equality, the consequences of her own actions bring her in a position where she has to choose, as if a modern Antigone, either her daughter

or her society. Neither choice is good, and Najwa is very much trapped between them.

As we noted in the start of the chapter, Zahra's marriage is by no means unique, and particularly within a religious community where solidarity, equality and exclusivity are highly valorised, endogamy, in its many forms, is a serious problem. Thus, in the remaining part of this section, I expand and relate the Druze material to the broader problematic of marriage endogamy. An apt but not impenetrable boundary, the 'insider–outsider' distinction is a significant component of cultural classifications in Syria and also in recasting 'endogamy' within the cultural and social framework in which it is practised:

> with so much emphasis on family, the people of Wusta viewed members of the family cycle as 'insiders', a category distinctly different from that of 'outsiders'. In the exceptional case in which people did not fit, it was possible to reassign them to a more appropriate category in order to maintain the correctness of the theory.
>
> (Rugh 1997: 217)

Beyond, but not exclusive of, economic or rationalist explanations of endogamy, this explanation speaks directly to marriage preference within the extended family. Moreover, endogamy is a good case of exploring how hierarchical relations intersect, overlap and are expressed through kinship practices. Endogamy (from Greek *endon*, meaning 'inner' or internal; and *gamos*, 'marriage'), is defined amongst the Druze as the socially and religiously sanctioned prohibition of marriage between a Druze and a non-Druze (Alamuddin and Starr 1980; Layish 1982). However, as a cultural practice it is multiple, it extends beyond the realm of marriage, and it is found throughout the Arab world:

> Arab culture – and this, of course, includes the Druze – is endogamous in the sense that, as people move up the social ladder, they turn relationships inward rather than outward. Endogamy idealises behaviour. As an index of high status, it applies only to exclusive groups and communities.
>
> (Khuri 2004: 197)

Even within the Druze sect, class and status are important indicators, as explored in Chapter 2. Indeed, it would be unfair not to note that Zahra's mother, Najwa, was only saddened by Zahra's marriage choice. Najwa, throughout most of my fieldwork, was trying repeatedly to set her eldest son up with one of his cousins, whilst actively sabotaging all his previous or subsequent relationships.

However, endogamy may also serve to 'increase antagonisms over the interests that seem to unite them – land and women' (Alamuddin and Starr 1980: 36; for a Jordanian example, see Antoun 1972). Hence, the possession of a long genealogy correlates with a high rate of endogamous marriages – both traditionally vestiges of the elites (called *al-khassa*). *Al-'amma*, the commoners, have no such pretensions, and evidence from Khuri's research on the Druze villages of northern Palestine seems to suggest a positive correlation between family group size, endogamy, and resource control (2004: 198–9; Alamuddin and Starr 1980: 26). Khuri's work in Jabal al-Summaq and in Lebanon hints at the relation between the degree of endogamy, localisation of family group and land accumulation: the higher the percentage of endogamy, the more likely it is that agnatic and cognatic relatives live in close proximity and the higher the wealth accumulation (Khuri 2004: 203), which seems to suggest that the practice of endogamy is more closely associated with Druze elites. At the same time, other factors constitute significant vectors for endogamy, such as location especially in the form of village endogamy, political faction and social class (cf. Alamuddin and Starr 1980):

> kinship and village endogamy are cross-cut by other, no less significant, forms of endogamous marriages: namely those involving religious specialisation, social class and factional allegiance [. . .] of all the social categories that make up Druze society, the religious shaikhs are the most endogamous: if a religious shaikh marries a woman who is not a shaikha, she will have to become one.
>
> (Khuri 2004: 209)

There is no requirement that a *shaykha*'s husband be a *shaykh* himself, however, there is an increasing differentiation between religious and non-religious segments of the Druze society (Azzam 2007: 158).

Indeed, many of my Druze informants would place equality as the most important factor for a successful marriage. Nevertheless, Azzam describes an *ajawid* (high-ranking religious segment, also known as the *mashāyikh*) woman who married a *jismani* (non-religious, lay) man, whose case is instructive because it complicates patriarchy with religion and economy: Shaykha 'Afaf had come from a poor but shaykhly family and had been 'trapped' by Raouf, who, in the words of her *shaykha* neighbour:

> he had told her family [...] he was thinking of joining the mashayikh community. We never believed that he would do that; we believed that he thought that, by having a shaykha as a wife, he could do whatever he wanted and she would not complain; and this is what happened.
>
> (Azzam 2007: 158)

As *shaykha*s are perceived to be pious, obedient and submissive they are structurally desirable but also vulnerable to exploitation in (faction-) exogamous marriages, since the husband is not bound by the same doctrinal duties or piety (Azzam 2007: 157–8). Patriarchy encompasses moral and material economy and Azzam offers vivid and rare descriptions of forced marriages, repudiation, divorce, domestic violence and honour killings. However, these evocative descriptions of gender inequality, subordination and abuse are framed within liberal religious apologetics by blaming a, presumably Islamic, tradition: 'traditional patterns of patriarchical dominance [... contradict] the status they [women] are given in the [Druze] Scriptures' (Azzam 2007: 156). Three points of relevance come out of Azzam's study: first, her study provides novel and brave ethnographic insight, especially her detailed case studies shine new light into women's experience of gender and religion in the Druze of Lebanon. However, colonial history and the political and moral economy of patriarchy remain seriously under-analysed.[14] This, then, leads Azzam to an unconditional acceptance of the secular modernist liberal project ignoring that 'what is at stake in Western critiques of Islam':

> is not simply a question of ideological bias, but rather the way these critiques function within a vast number of institutional sites

> and practices aimed at transforming economic, political, and moral life in the Middle East – from international financial institutions to human rights associations to national and local administrative bureaucracies. The transformations brought about within the context of this vast modernizing project have enveloped the entire social fabric of the Middle East, impacting everything from pedagogical techniques to conceptions of moral and bodily health to patterns of familial and extra-familial relations.
>
> (Mahmood 2005: 191)

Bearing in mind the post-colonial critique of anthropological understandings of gender and modernity in the Middle East, however, does not help us to sufficiently understand why Zahra's liberal parents ostracised their daughter because of her exogamous marriage. Sure, honour killings are known to happen, and such stories, real or not, proliferate in social life, both amongst the Druze as well as more broadly in Syria. Described as 'the murder of a female by a male relative to "wash away" the shame accruing to the family and "redeem" its honour' (Azzam 2007: 185), honour killings occur at real or suspected instances of 'immorality', usually pertaining to unsolicited sexuality, but also unsolicited marriage choice, such as marrying outside the sect. Socially acceptable as evidenced by the lax legal framework that corresponds to murderers (Azzam 2007: 189), honour killings are actually 'contrary of the values and principles of *al-Tawḥid*' (Azzam 2007: 185). Whilst there are some instances of socially approved sect exogamous marriages, for example the Joumblatts have often married at their *emir* status rather than sect, whilst the Atrash family has often provided well-sought after women to Sunni elites (Khuri 2004: 204), these are highly exclusive exceptions. To most Druze, these options are not available and the best outcome of a sect exogamous marriage is the exclusion of the transgression from the social and religious aspects of the community (Azzam 2007: 190), and their offspring's exclusion from the family.

Endogamy, as a practice through which social groups are produced and reproduced is closely connected to issues of power and patriarchy. An ambitious attempt at critiquing the perceived wisdom regarding the Arab family employing philosophical and psychological theories has

been made by anthropologist Suad Joseph in the volume she edits, *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (1999). In the introduction to the volume, Joseph unpicks understandings of 'the' Arab family through processes of 'selving' defined as the process by which personhoods emerge (1999: 3) as neither individualist nor corporatist (Joseph 1999: 11). Noting that a simple definition of relationality as 'selves [. . .] shaped in relationship to others' is too obvious, Joseph redefines the concept as the:

> historically and culturally specific constructs of relationality in the contexts of intimate relationships of families in the Arab world. It is about intimate relationality as a foundational framework, underwriting notions of self that do not conform to the individualistic, separative, bounded, autonomous constructs subscribed to in much of Western psychodynamic theory.
>
> (Joseph 1999: 2)

Joseph further elaborates the definition of relationality describing it as 'a process by which persons are socialised into social systems that value linkage, bonding and sociability. Relationality is a process by which socially oriented selves are produced under different regimes of political economy' (1999: 9). Whilst the more cross-cultural dexterous concept of 'personhoods' (Carrithers *et al.*: 1985) may have been more appropriate to 'self', Joseph's elaboration of relationality and 'intimate selving' at times seems to leave unchallenged assumptions inherent in notions such as 'family' and 'self'. For example, having criticised the shortfalls of corporatist theories, Joseph herself asserts such a position by claiming that 'family is valued over and above the person' (1999: 12). Moreover, in order to explain the political economy of intimate selving, Joseph offers the concept of 'patriarchical connectivity':

> I use patriarchy here to mean the privileging of males and seniors and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality, and idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and aged domination. I use patriarchical connectivity to mean the production of selves with fluid boundaries organised for gendered and aged domination in a culture valorising kin structures, morality, and idioms.
>
> (Joseph 1999: 12)

However, this definition of patriarchical connectivity appears to be based on the uniqueness of a 'culture valorising kin structures' – both the use of culture and kinship are problematic here for three reasons. First, arguably there is little evidence of *any* cultures that do not valorise kinship (in either structure, morality or idioms). Indeed, the family and the state are intimately connected in official nationalist ideologies in the Middle East (Alonso 1994) and beyond. For example, Herzfeld shows how the Greek word *genos/yenia* (loosely translated as an agnatic group similar to the Arabic *ḥasab*) is used in nationalist rhetoric to signify how the nation is a 'superordinate *genos*' (Herzfeld 2005: 76), and how 'in a characteristic exercise of metaphorical expansionism, the state expropriates the language of kinship, treating familistic interests as inimical to the common language of the nation' (Herzfeld 2005: 112). In Syria, Wedeen explains that the image of Hafez al-Assad as the national 'father' operates within:

> the official narrative to represent the regime's idealised relations of domination and membership and to specify the form of public obedience in Syria [. . .] Asad's role as national patriarch positions him symbolically as the dominant figure in a hierarchical national community; citizen-children owe him their obedience.
>
> (Wedeen 1999: 51)

'The Americans' in the case of Kholud's wedding serve as an example of how it is impossible to distinguish between the cultural and nationalist valorisation of kinship, since we often find kinship as a strategic, and therefore ambiguous, signifier, a simulacra of the reified notions of culture, sect or nation, within contested formations of the state.

Writing on family associations in Lebanon and arguing that urbanisation does not necessarily diminish kinship social and economic bonds, Samir Khalaf notes regarding what he calls 'pervasive familism':

> Since blood ties are intimate and binding, the sovereignty of the family transcends all other loyalties, and the individual is compelled at times to suppress his individuality if it happens to clash with the whims and rigid dictates of the family. [. . .]

> Filial piety is almost a sacred norm; a debt one owes his kin [. . .] One's society begins and ends with his family; so much so that anyone outside the family tends to be regarded as though he is outside society.
>
> (Khalaf 1971: 236–7)

Finally, Joseph does not discuss the relationship between, on one hand, the valorisation of kin and, on the other, the systemic inequalities situated within the shifting contours of historical, local and global interstices; this brings the unintended consequence of ignoring those hierarchical relationships that lay outside of the realms of gender and age.

Perhaps then, the problem with endogamy is the problem of an *unsolicited* exogamous marriage. Zahra's marriage, described often as immoral and shameful by her mother, as an *act* of sin because it is seen as the most socially destructive form of selfishness, a betrayal to the religion, the community, as well as to the institution of family and directed personally at her parents. At the same time the result of this betrayal is but personal as it reinforces sect solidarity, by which endogamy becomes a boundary in the classic sense that Barth (1969) uses for group inclusion and exclusion. This chapter has described how it is this precise boundary of endogamy and marriage that frames what is permissible moral social conduct amongst the Druze of Jaramana. This was achieved through demonstrating the embodied role of nuptial bodies in ritual practice, and specifically how endogamous ideology combines with ritual practice to reify the Druze sect by demonstrating how cultural intimacy (cf. Herzfeld 2005 [1997]) does not only operate on the level of state and citizens, but, first and foremost, on the minute ceremonials of sects and bodies.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges in theories of kinship in the Middle East remains the accommodation of structure and culture within an active framework of history and politics. In order to contribute to a relational and historical framework of the poetics and politics of weddings in Jaramana, this chapter has approached practices of marriage, as previous chapters have approached questions of households and life-cycle transformations: through a series of struggles, that it is hoped, challenge essentialist, evolutionist and culturalist claims regarding Arab bodies (cf. Feldman 2004: 209).

Conclusion: Intimacy, Violence and Marriage or, What Became of Zahra

Appadurai, slightly turning Herzfeld's (2005) notion of 'cultural intimacy', in his paper 'Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization' (1998; also see 2006) explores the 'dead certainty' of deadly uncertainty: how once intimate bodies, such as those of friends and neighbours, can suddenly be turned into vehicles of deceit and danger, and from once intimate bodies, during periods of crises and ethnic, collective or civil violence, they can become bodies to be fought, penetrated, mutilated and lacerated. 'Ethnocidal violence evidently mobilises some sort of ambient rage about the body as a theatre of deception, of betrayal, and of false solidarity,' notes Appadurai (1998: 238), exposing 'a horrible range of intimacies' (Appadurai 1998: 239) in which 'the body remains a site of intimacy, and in the many different forms that bodily violence takes in different contexts, there is a common thread of intimacy gone berserk' (Appadurai 1998: 240).

A brief illustration with Zahra: Zahra's body never became nuptial – never really agreed to reproduce the body-politic that would render it unthreatening in as much as intimate. But what of Zahra's mother? For her, her daughter's body remains intimate, and for whose intimacy she stubbornly continues to fight for through emphatically denying not only the legitimacy of her daughter's marriage but also the finality and irreversibility of the event of her marriage. Zahra's mother continues to try to persuade her daughter to return to Syria in two ways. Either as a trap, a conspiracy, that her daughter has fallen into ('it's your husband that trapped you; he had it all planned out'), or as a hypocritical, deceitful daughter ('you are not my daughter,' 'I did not raise you like this,' 'you are a traitor'). Oscillating between an outsider's conspiracy and an insider's betrayal, Zahra's mother refuses to see herself reflected on the body of her daughter, denying not only her responsibilities and avoiding not only the question of her intellectual, secular rhetoric and conservative practice, but her narrative of conspiracy and betrayal is permeated by the inherent ambiguities of intimacy and power: unpredictability and fluidity. This resonates with rhetoric theories in which rhetorical persuasion operates by instigating movements (in the mother's case these are oscillations which represent alternative rhetorical strategies and movements in different directions) along a continuum

between the extremes of familiarity and the most uncertain and unknown (the space of the so-called 'inchoate' which *is* the unknown, it doesn't exist statically at one end of a spectrum but can emerge at any moment by virtue of a changed situation or circumstance – which requires delineation and response, see Carrithers [2008], Fernandez [1986]). This ambiguity that characterises intimate relations also plays a significant role in theories of violence, in which intimacy is easily translocated into deceit and betrayal.

The experience of violent ostracism from one's family due to a breach in solicited marriage choice, is not unique to Zahra or to the Druze community. Bouthaina Shaaban, currently the political and media adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has written about her own story of ostracism from her family because she chose to marry a Muslim man of different ethnicity (Shaaban 1988: 6–11). It is a truism to say that violence breeds violence, and in Zahra's case it is fair to say that intimacy breeds violence, that violence is the result of intimacy, for to be afflicted a movement must firstly be made, a movement towards, a touch (Manning 2007). Intimate violence, like the ritual nuptial process, entails its norms, its violence, and paints its own aesthetics. These aesthetics invest bodies, forming and performing on and through them the particular poetics of violence, a body-politic of mutilations, penetrations, lacerations. The theme of intimacy and violence will be further explored in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

MARRIAGE, THE STATE AND FOLKLORE FESTIVALS

Some Fires Burn More than Others

[10 August 2009] *Bosra is on fire. Red lights shine through the night in the ancient Roman amphitheatre. The smoke pours onto the stage, where the famous pop singer, Ali Deek, and his orchestra have set the audience and the stage on metaphorical fire. Everyone is dancing: old men in traditional attire, women with children in their hands, with or without a hijab on their heads, young men and women in groups, people in the front rows, at the back, on the stairs, officials, guests and dignitaries along with ordinary, village people. The impressive Roman theatre of Bosra, one of the world's best preserved, located in the municipality of Daraa, is filled beyond its 1,500 capacity. On the fourth day of the 21st International Bosra Festival* (mahrajān Bosra al-dawly), *the excitement is hard to contain, it spills and collects in the empty space between the stage and the rows where the audience sits – groups of people ride on the tide of this excitement and land on that in-between space where the stage ends and the seats begin. The police are called, and the festival's organisers give orders, to keep the line, to make human chains, to obscure the way to the stage. And as soon as the policemen make a human chain, they begin dancing as well. The atmosphere is extraordinary ... Astonished, I have never seen anything like it. It is as if I am in some old-fashioned movie in which the happy ending is celebrated by a spontaneous outburst of dance. All people, officials and policemen included, have joined in an enchanting organic*



Figure 5.1 Moment from the 21st International Bosra Festival. Photograph by the author.

dance of dabkeh. *United by this fiery dance, the amphitheatre is spatially reconstructed into a space of intimacy and transgression in which the seeming chaos makes perfect cultural sense.*

[25 March 2011] *Daraa is on fire. The municipality in which Syria's first and longest running cultural festival is located, the Bosra International Festival, established in 1971, a year after Hafez al-Assad came to power, has become the centre of violent clashes between the Syrian state and the Syrian people. Ironically, at the heart of the Syrian state's cultural policies, Daraa seems to be the one farthest away from the state's grip . . . On 18 March, unprecedented protests began as 15 youths were arrested for writing revolutionary slogans on a wall, inspired by the tide of what is called the 'Arab Spring'. On the first day of protest, six people were killed. As the month rolled to an end, more than 60 had lost their lives in clashes with the police in the municipality of Daraa. The governor's residence was set on fire; a similar destiny awaited the Ba'th Party offices. Newsagents rushed to say that the veil of fear and the wall of silence had, at long last, fallen in Syria. But as the people of Daraa buried their dead,*



Figure 5.2 Audience at the 21st International Bosra Festival. Photograph by the author.

most of the country watched, uncomfortably maybe, but just watched. April brought more protests, and an estimated 500 deaths. May saw, amongst other towns and neighbourhoods, Daraa besieged. Towards the start of the summer, the number of martyrs had surpassed a thousand. Protests spread and so did blood. Now, who guards the stage, and more importantly, who will join the dance?

One of the few arenas of public life where state representatives and citizens come directly into contact in a demarcated space is during popular festivals sponsored by the Syrian state. These festivals often take the form of national and international folkloric exposes, most notable of which are: the Bosra International Festival, the Silk Road Festival and the National Folklore Festival in Idleb. In the contexts of authoritarian, one-party rule and in the absence of open and free elections, these festivals provide opportunities as well as excuses for the interaction of the Syrian state with its subjects as means of renewing and consolidating legitimacy, consent and animated enforcement of state loyalties. In this chapter, I explore the politics of marriage and dance in state-sponsored

folklore festivals. These politics at times of peace bound together the Syrian state with its subjects, in the times of war however, the politics of cultural harmony turned into sectarian strife. The idea, or aspiration, of 'harmony' helps us understand the mechanisms and successes of the Syrian state's cultural politics. It also serves, as a potent mythic metaphor with which to unpick and analyse its apparent contradictions and limitations.

Harmony, as both myth and mechanism, needs further investigation.

The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony and the Burial of the Martyrs

The myth of Cadmus and Harmony haunts all states – it is right there near the presumptuous roots of their own mythical creation and eternal existence, imprinted as an immortality that surrounds (often suffocating) a mortal polity, and in its most dangerous form, becoming the immortal a priori for even the merest existence of its mortal subjects, built on the incongruity of a promised but never materialised marriage:

> The gods didn't realise, nor did men, that that wedding feast in Thebes was the closest they would ever get to each other. The next morning, the Olympians left the palace. Cadmus and Harmony woke up in the bed Aphrodite had made for them. Now they were just a king and queen.
>
> (Calasso 1993: 387–8)

Cadmus, Phoenician prince son of King Agenor from Sidon, had left his land behind in search of his sister Europa, abducted by Zeus in the guise of a white bull. His search brought him to Greece at a time when the Olympian gods had fled Olympus as the Titan Typhon had succeeded in overthrowing and capturing Zeus. Cadmus' road brought him near to the cave where Typhon was slowly dismembering Zeus, pulling out his sinews and taking over his thunderbolts. Typhon appeared in front of Cadmus, full of his newly acquired powers, and imitating Zeus – an act at once powerful and ridiculous (ridiculous precisely because of his imitation that foreclosed difference more than resemblance), challenged Cadmus to a competition. Cadmus competed with the monster, but only to trick him; in the meantime, Zeus escaped and gathered his strength. Typhon was to be incarcerated in the depths of Etna, and Cadmus, as a gift from Zeus, was promised a wife, Harmony, and the kingdom of a

great city that he would found. That is how Cadmus, a mortal, travelled to Samothrace to take Harmony, the daughter of Aphrodite and Ares brought up by Zeus' lover Electra, as his immortal wife, and then to travel until he came to the place in which he founded his city, Thebes.

Yet, genealogies and even histories are but a contextual footnote here. A single event is of interest, an event that, magnificent as it was and perhaps because of this uniqueness, united and separated mortals and immortals at a singular point, at a junction that was never to be crossed again. In the marriage of Cadmus and Harmony it was the last time that the Olympian gods came close to mortals in their human shape. A moment in space and in time of union not only between Cadmus, a mortal, and Harmony, a goddess, but a public acknowledgment of some private intimacy that united the couple and also that ran between mortals and immortals, an intimacy that could be nothing but momentary: a closeness rendered possible insofar as it was beyond time itself, insofar it was singular, a moment that allowed time to begin and to be separated into the myth, the present, the future.[1]

Harmony, then, was the precondition of the splendid celebrations, Zeus' gift embodied, his promise of 'cosmic harmony' enacted, in a marriage celebrated by gods and mortals alike. But Harmony was never a process, and could not be imprisoned in time. She was a shy girl in Samothrace, a woman given Hephaestus' ill-fated necklace in Thebes. In her later years she would continue her life as a snake, whilst all her progeny, children and grandchildren, were to be lacerated like no other (Calasso 1993: 389). And this is not paradoxical, only a bit ironic. Because Harmony was not a precondition for unions between dissimilars but the precondition for the celebration of difference through the brief actualisation of intimacy, a closeness between mortals and immortals in an elusively similar form. In this way, Harmony *was* the marriage; before she was the wishful promise of union, and after, her tormented progeny were just a testament of what had once been; they were the necessary discord that is the result of harmony. Thus, Sallust is tilted 90 degrees: 'these things never happened, but are always', becomes in Harmony a definite temporality that is always present not because it exists but because it *happened*. The irony of the story is, then, that because it did happen, once, it cannot happen again. The proof is not only myth, but in Harmony's outcomes, her daughters: Agave, Autonoë, Ino and Semele.

The marriage of Cadmus and Harmony enters the study of the reification of the Syrian state through folklore festivals, ironically but not paradoxically, as a potent metaphor (the most splendid marriage of time), not only as an expression of the immortal state offering the promise of harmony between itself and its mortal subjects, but also because most of the folklore festivals, if not all, are staged marriages. Dances and theatre acts that represent traditional or village marriages, marriages as metaphors of the staged union between tradition and modernity, authenticity and globalisation, marriage between the state and the subjects, and finally marriage as a practice under the patronage of the benevolent state. Connecting folklore to marriage and authority, the Syrian state attempts to create a public simulacrum of not only reified self-gratification but also of a spatial intimacy between its subjects. It promises an embalmed Harmony, tempting but dead, to an uninterested Cadmus, but the state is never quite Zeus, and the actualisations of its promise become as powerful and as ridiculous as was Typhon at the moment of his glory, that moment before his fall. When the extravagant marriage of Cadmus and Harmony becomes a state affair, then the subtle titillating beauties and ironies of the myth become state policy. The policy may go on, entrenched as it may become in spatial practices of co-construction, reification and constitution in which the state as much as its subjects are responsible for sustaining, a process which Herzfeld (2005) eloquently calls 'cultural intimacy' and in which the spaces of construction are mutually embodied and performed, comedies or tragedies depending on the time. But this theatre policy breaks down with the burial of its very own actors and martyrs. The blood that fed the thirsty grain fields of Daraa doesn't just change the face of the land on which it was spilt, it transforms the contract and the intimate distance between state and subjects, an intimacy performed and practised, in both colour and density.

Before she died in the present war in Syria, Harmony, specifically 'cultural harmony' between the Ba'thist state in Syria and its multi-ethnic and multi-religious subjects, was one of the most successful policies of statecraft. Indeed, my ethnographic research on folklore and dance in state-sponsored festivals went against much of what I had read about the state's absolute repression of artistic expression (Cooke 2007), and of the absurd and ridiculous spectacular mechanics that commanded subjects to the public performance of 'as if politics' (Wedeen 1999).

As in my field notes from Bosra Festival above, the festivals I went to were warmly anticipated and genuinely entertaining occasions, at least insofar as I could see no one was forced to publicly comply. These festivals were spectacular and entertaining occasions – and quite important as well, since they provided, in the absence of fair and free elections, a public space for state and citizens to meet.

But they were important and peculiar for a second reason: on the stage of these festivals, on as it were the state's stage, danced and performed collective ethnic and sectarian identities that were not supposed to exist, based on the secular Ba'thist discourse, in Syria. For example, the Kurdish ethnic minority that legally and politically was unacknowledged (actually stateless), was always represented in folklore festivals throughout the country, whilst the Kurdish troupe from the village of Ifrin was praised by the ministry of culture for its contribution to folklore dance during the Idlib festival in 2009. Explicitly sectarian identities of Shi'a, Sunni, Alawi, Druze, Christian were openly celebrated at the same time as officially being non-existent according to the official secular state discourse. Instead of homogeneity, the Syrian state seemed to be valorising difference. This went against everything I knew as an anthropologist and a Greek. I thought that all nation states survived on the basis of implementing homogeneity. But the Syrian state, seemed to thrive on difference. What kind of difference was this? How had the Syrian state managed this difference, quite successfully for over 40 years? And, why were all folklore performances on state-sponsored festivals staged as marriages?

To answer these questions this chapter examines the cultural policies of the Ba'thist regime in pre-war Syria. Focusing on folklore state-sponsored festivals allows for an ethnographically grounded understanding of the political role of marriage and the ideological manipulation of cultural or sectarian harmony as the Syrian State's discourse of 'soft power'. This chapter is a combination of political theories of the state, and ethnographic analyses of how the Syrian state, through its cultural policies, attempts to naturalise, neutralise and command potentially threatening sectarian identifications. It is an exploration of the mechanisms by which the Syrian state *attempts* to obtain popular consent through its internal cultural policies, and in doing so, the ways that it builds and reifies itself as an almost transcendental empire, legitimate to rule over its polymorphous

contemporary polity. The chapter is divided into two parts. Through two case studies from folklore festivals, Part I demonstrates that the cultural policies of the Syrian state are neither 'nationalistic' nor homogenising, two tactics through which the nation state is often conceptualised, but rather they strategise the discourse of 'cultural harmony', regional diversity and the secular rhetoric of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, Part I argues that the Syrian state should be better considered as a state-of-empire rather than a nation state. Part II focuses on the use of marriage as the recurrent motif in folklore dance performances. To explore why marriage is important in statecraft, the detailed ethnographic analysis of the award-winning dance by Toutoul troupe from Raqqa is used to shed light on the choreographies and politics of marriage.

Part I: Theorising the State: State Ideologies and Tactics

Marx and Engels noted that every state is a dictatorship, representing and implementing the interests of its ruling classes; Weber noted that states possess the legitimate monopoly of power. But, can we ask what the state 'is'? Giambattista Vico in his lifetime was awarded only once an academic prize for an essay, now lost, regarding the etymology of the term 'state':

> in Italian, *stato* is used as the past perfect participle of the verb for 'be' (*essere*, significantly, a cognate of the English word *essentialism*, but directly derived from *stare*, stand, be in a certain state or condition). Such an etymology represents the state as the ultimate eternal verity, that which 'has [always] been,' and as such an outstanding example of what we would today call *naturalization*. In that case, the transformation of a verb particle into a noun – *lo stato*, the state – bears witness to a process of reification.
>
> (Herzfeld 2005: 73)

The 'state' has been a particularly 'elusive' object of study (Abrams 2006 [1988]: 113) because conceptualisations of the term oscillate between the slippery, and often dichotomous, analytical tropes that cast 'it' as either an objective, distinguishable entity set apart from society, or as a subjective, non-existing, and almost illusionary effect of political

systems and/or of historical and political relations of power. Having set out in Chapter 1 the theoretical and historical premises for the understanding of state and sect that underpins this work, in this section I briefly outline theories of the 'state' that will aid in investigating the Syrian paradox of the valorisation of heterogeneity and difference, that seems to be going against the homogenising cultural appropriations that are so closely and fundamentally associated with processes of nationalism and the nation state. What kind of ideological underpinning forges state rhetoric in Syria?

Abrams (2006: 122) suggests a need to 'abandon the state as a material object of study [. . .] whilst continuing to take the *idea* of the state extremely seriously.' Combining unlikely bedfellows such as Marxist thought (specifically Engels and Poulantzas) and Durkheim, Abrams views the state as a social fact but not a thing (Abrams 2006: 122), and he defines it as an 'ideological project', as 'the distinctive collective misrepresentation of capitalist societies' (Abrams 2006: 122). Mitchell, building upon and expanding on Foucault, suggests that contrary to an 'idea', the state is rather an 'effect' of contingent relations, methods and techniques of disciplinary power: 'the apparent boundary of the state does not mark the limit of the processes of regulation. It is itself a product of those processes' (Mitchell 2006 [1999]: 175–6). Harvey agrees with Abrams and Mitchell that states are reproduced and reified through everyday practices, but contra Mitchell (and Foucault) he argues that the driver of regulation, discipline and management practices that reify the state in both space and time is the process of capital circulation within capitalism: 'if the state did not already exist in some form or other the circulation of capital in space and time would have to create some kind of territorial organisation very much like one' (Harvey 2009: 266). He also criticises Abrams on his dismissal of the state's materiality: 'borders are, to be sure, social construction, but when turned into elaborate physical fortifications, they render moot the dismissal of the materiality of the state as an inadmissible reification' (Harvey 2009: 267). Instead, Harvey proposes the following definition for the state:

> A dialectically constituted construct, a 'relative permanence' caught between absolute, relative, and relational definitions, between material social practices, representations, and ways of

> living. It is the outcome of distinctive processes of place making caught up in an interactive politics of territorialisation.
>
> (Harvey 2009: 279)

Although Abrams', Mitchell's and Harvey's conceptions of the state make little reference of class structure, conflict, and the stratification of interests and policies (we will turn to this in the following section); they offer a vital framework for understanding the state and for de-coupling the nation and the state from their assumed co-existence, by placing emphasis on the ideological, historical, and embodied practices, as well as the economic processes, that constitute and reify the state. Secondly, these are dialectic and relational conceptualisations, thus viewing the 'state' not as a priori, not as the aggregate result of modernisation, and not as a universal given. As such, they are useful in understanding the uneasy and often contradictory relationship between the Syrian state[2] and the Syrian people. This relationship has only and exclusively been previously defined rather simplistically as repressive and authoritarian, a unilateral imposition of domination and coercion on behalf of the state onto subjugated subjects with little or no agency (see George 2003). Denying Syrians agency vis-à-vis the political realities of their everyday lives consolidates them as non-actors not only in their country's political formations. Instead, the focus on reification helps to provide a different avenue in exploring 'the possibilities and the limits of creative dissent' (Herzfeld 2005: 1), of the ways that power relations are never one-sided, but always unstable, and to different degrees negotiated, reinforced and resisted.

Finally, the aforementioned theoretical premises are helpful in evading some of the traps, binary oppositions and ethnocentric biases often represented in debates pertaining to the 'nation state'. Although none of these theorists explicitly state it, they all underscore that the almost 'transcendental association' of the state with the nation (Mitchell 2006: 176) is a quite specific and subsequent ideological project of the state and therefore by no means universal (Abrams 2006; Harvey 2009). This is rather pertinent for a new paradigm shift in the way that Middle Eastern states and people have been theorised as a top-down imposition. This imposition has been explored almost exclusively in terms of modernisation theories and specifically through debates on the present and future, successes and failures of nation states within the Middle East.

The more nuanced of such understandings may view nations as imagined communities (Anderson 1991) and nationalism as the 'entry to, participation in, identification with, a literate high culture which is co-extensive with an entire political unit and its total populations' (Gellner 1983: 95). The consensus is that because the Middle East lacks 'a homogeneous national population' which is the 'basic requirement of the externally imposed nation-state' somehow the 'nation-state has failed to take root in the Middle East' (Tibi 1996: 174–9), creating thus 'states without foundations' (Kelidar 1993). However, the Syrian state has been very successful even despite the lack of a homogeneous nationalist ideology. A homogenous population is not a prerequisite of the nation state but a result of such processes (Anderson 1991; Mitchell 2006), whilst the processes of homogenising the population are never quite complete even within so-called 'established' nation states (Herzfeld 2005). More recently, Al-Barghouti (2008) offers a nuanced historical analysis of the mistranslation and thus mis-realisation of the territorially based notions of nation and state to the 'indigenous' notions of *umma* and *dawla*. The issue this chapter challenges is that the theories of nations, nationalisms and nation states contain a tautological effect in that they often presuppose and require both a 'state' and a 'nation'. This is historically ethnocentric, and empirically unfounded. Placing emphasis on the state and viewing nationalism or the concept of the nation as only one of many *tactics* and techniques through which reification of the state is substantiated is, I show, closer to the mark. To understand the successes and the failures of Syrian state ideology, first we must analytically de-couple the 'state' from the 'nation'. In the pages that follow, it will become clear that the Syrian state uses alternative methods to 'nation' and 'nationalism', such as the embodied discourse of cultural harmony, marriage and unity in diversity, in order to legitimate itself in the eyes and in the dances of its citizens.

Cultural Policies – Cultural Politics: Why Folklore Festivals?

> Folklore has been studied primarily as a 'picturesque' element. [. . .] Folklore should instead be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition [. . .] to 'official' conceptions of the world. [. . .] This conception of the world is not

> elaborated and systematic [. . .] it is, rather, many-sided – not only because it includes different and juxtaposed elements, but also because it is stratified.
>
> (Gramsci 1999: 360)

What can be learnt about the Syrian state and its relationship to its heterogenous polity through its cultural policies, and specifically through state-organised folklore festivals? Anthropologists have long suspected that dance entails much more than body movements in the vicinity of music,[3] since dance occupies the intersection between concepts and practices of pleasure, power and the technology of the body (cf. Bourdieu 2007 [1977]; Foucault 1991a [1977], 1998 [1978]), through the ways by which it embodies (Bourdieu 2007: 87–95) and negotiates the boundaries of cultural performances.[4] Recent anthropological theories converge on the point that dance constitutes a site of 'both gender struggle and class struggle' (Washabaugh 1998: 9), whilst much of this literature emphasises the study of gendered contestations.[5] In regards to the Middle East, recent works reflect nuanced attempts to disentangle the historical, social, cultural and political frameworks of arts and popular culture(s) in a region located along long and complex historical and cultural crossroads, as within economic and political struggles, and attempt to understand the formations and transformations, the visions and divisions pertaining to cultural production, performance and practice, whether it is musical, danced, theatrical or within the myriad contours of everyday life's manifestations.[6] Such works focus on issues of modernity, tradition, Western hegemony and its negotiations and resistance, and issues of power relations specifically pertaining to gendered struggles. Less emphasis, however, has been paid to the political ramifications of cultural policies and politics *internally*, vis-à-vis state and subjects.

In forging the nation Assad and the Baʻth put to use history, archaeology and the cultural and scientific achievements of the Arabs. A commonly held view was that Syria had been asleep for ten centuries, denatured by alien control, but must now be stirred to life, a prerequisite for which was an understanding of the past (Seale 1989: 459).

Cultural policies and cultural politics are important arenas for 'forging the nation' as Seale puts it, significant *tropes* of statecraft. The appropriation, invention or re-invention of history through claims of common heritage, ownership or culture not only presuppose a static

understanding of the past but are also deeply political and politicised narratives, which, through careful manipulation, represent claims to both legitimacy as well as authority. History is carefully assembled from many stories, and fitted within the narrow paradigms of one grand narrative appropriate for the nation state (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 2006 [1983]). As for folklore dance, it offers an interface, being one of the many possible stages upon which the ideological formations of the state reach out, perform and portray their own historical and political visions: 'as an embodiment of cultural heritage, the dancer becomes inscribed in nationalist histories and is reconfigured to conform to these histories' (Reed 1998: 511; also see Shay 2002 for the relationship specifically between State and folklore dance companies). As a public performance and a public spectacle (Foucault 1991a [1977]), the officially sanctioned narratives of history and culture are manifested, appropriated and performed in ways that go beyond verbal propaganda: as embodied practices, dances do not only relay the sanctioned story which substantiates government's power, but they also embody state narrative, its contradictions and limitations, they *become* the state: 'spectacles make power palpable, publicly visible and practical' (Wedeen 1999: 21). Furthermore, dances interact with audiences, through the visible display of power, and by inscribing 'tangibly' (Wedeen 1999: 22) on the bodies of the dancers and audience the sanctioned repertoire of their own practices.

Overview of Folklore Festivals in Syria

Through public festivals of popular culture and folklore, the state does not only sponsor and organise the event, but also sponsors, manages and structures what is, could be and what is not 'popular culture'. State interest and investment in cultural affairs began during the age of Syria's union with Nasser's Egypt (UAR 1959–63). Cairo had long been the cultural capital of the Arab world and already had a well-developed ensemble of theatrical, musical and dance troupes (Shay 2002: 126–62). Nasser's Egypt, the UAR and the subsequent Ba'thist Syrian Arab Republic were also influenced by Soviet policy – especially cultural state policy in the valorisation of national, working-class values and practices (Wedeen 1999). Both folklore research as well as folklore performance became highly subsidised by the state, and increasingly came to represent the state rhetoric and policy.

Festivals organised and sponsored by the Syrian state address both local as well as international audiences. Since Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970, the Bosra International Festival has been annually or bi-annually organised in the ancient Roman amphitheatre in Bosra, Daraa, the largest and best-preserved amphitheatre of Roman times. Since 1978, the Bosra festival has been established as a bi-annual,[7] week-long celebration featuring folklore dance troupes from all over the Arab countries and the world, alongside local Syrian folklore troupes and popular music concerts. Its aims, as described by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA): 'The festival aims at spreading international cultural heritage and exchanging creative and artistic experiences among the Arab and foreign countries to develop, maintain and introduce those countries to the cultural legacy of Syria's heritage and specifically that of Daraa.' (Milhem 2009b).[8]

Other festivals include the ten-day Mahabba Festival in Lattakia (est. 1989, also known as Love Festival, renamed al-Basel after Basel al-Assad's death, see Sabbagh 2009), Syrian Song and Music Festivals in Aleppo, Euphrates Pearl Festival (est. 1977, Al-Kazhali 2009), Damascus International Fair (Zain 2010), Damascus International Festival of Theater (est. 1994, Sabbagh 2008), Arab Pioneer Creators Festival (Ghossoun 2008), and Al-Qalaa and Al-Wadi Festival in Homs (Said 2009a).

Public spectacles and celebrations formed a significant part of Hafez al-Assad's nation-building agenda; Bashar al-Assad continued and reinforced his father's policy: since 2000 many more festivals and public spectacles had been established in Syria, addressing local, regional and international audiences. These include the establishment of the National Idleb Festival, a week-long competition between regional Syrian folklore troupes and music concerts (Ismael 2009),[9] film and theatre festivals in Damascus, the Platform for Contemporary Dance in Damascus, the Silk Road Festival and smaller local festivals such as the Suwayda Mountain Festival (Milhem 2009a), Amrit Culture and Art Festival in Tartus (est. 2003, Milhem 2009c), and Phoenix Bird Festival in Tartus (est. 2009, Allafi and Eyon 2009).

During the 44 years that the Syrian regime has been in power, folklore festivals and national dance ensembles have been affected by many changes. These changes include: (1) the global political isolation of Syria as well as the shifting international political alliances that have

affected the country, and the participation of international troupes in its festivals; (2) financial constraints and unequal resource distribution for different festivals;[10] and (3) the emergence of private dance troupes (i.e. Enana and Ornina dance troupes), which are more popular than the national state troupe (Omayyia).[11]

Finally, folklore festivals in Syria reflect and embody certain structural, economic, regional and class-based inequalities. Whilst cities like Damascus and Aleppo have become the frequent hosts of international and contemporary festivals for theatre, music, dance and cinema, often destined for intellectual and elite local audiences as well as high-profile Arab and international participants and guests, the cities of the rural countryside such as Idleb, Bosra, Lattakia, Tartus, Der Er-zor and Suwayda, hosted folklore and popular arts festivals, with clearly more local participation and audience. In Syria the class differentiation is evident in the differences between high culture (*thaqāfa*) and popular culture (*al-fonoūn al-sha'abiyyeh*), that further becomes geographically inscribed onto other local inequalities between urban centres and rural countryside, and thus the distribution of different kinds of festivals reflects rather than a unified 'forging the nation', entrenched geographic/regional, class, social and rural–urban divides.[12] But why would the state impose itself in such a way as to denigrate its own nationalist rhetoric? I am suggesting in this chapter that, on the contrary, this more divisive approach (which I refer to through recourse to the concept of *empire*), is actually a powerful means by which the Syrian state seeks legitimacy from its heterogeneous polity.

Case Study 1: A Festival for External Consumption

Of all public spectacles, it is the Silk Road Festival that combines a grand historical narrative along with aspects of Syrian popular culture:

> The idea of the festival was founded about that trade caravans in the ancient world were moving cities full of forms of human activities starting from China through Asia for three years. [. . .] All this made Syria the unique country in the World that is not only crossed by Silk Road Caravans but it is the crossroads of these caravans that meet on its land arriving from the four corners of the world.
>
> As well as being the homeland for the most important forms of world dialogue through history which granted its people the

> continuity of creation, the tradition of hospitality, the warm cordiality and living in harmony, safety and peace. [sic]
>
> (Speech of H.E Dr Eng. Saadalla Agha Al Kalaa, Minister of Tourism at the Opening Ceremony of Silk Road Festival 2006)

The Silk Road Festival, sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and established in 2002, is primarily destined for external consumption: it is arranged as a multi-functional tourist guide of Syria, taking place for the duration of five days in different historically significant locations, such as Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra, Raqqa, Rassafah, Lattakia and Hama,[13] combining the historical and the folklore, offering foreign journalists and delegations of diplomats the opportunity to 'experience' Syrian culture and history:

> In intimate meeting, where the authentic past hugs the shining present, and East comes together with the West; [. . .] creating a bridge for dialogue between the world's nations in East and West on Syrian lands which were the cradle for civilizations and religions, and an intersection point of the roads and paths of International Trade, where caravans from the four corners of the world gathers. [sic]
>
> (Silk Road 2010 – New Destination towards Beautiful Past, Ministry of Tourism, Syria)

Through archaeological tours, folklore dance performances from Syrian regional dance troupes, to local food tasting sessions, the festival aims to bring to life Syria as the significant geopolitical crossroads between continents, cultures, regions and religions (see Al-Jazaeri and Sabbagh 2010; for the view from a participant's perspective, see Pomichalova 2008 and Mohr 2007). Reproducing its unique and heterogeneous historical and cultural heritage, the Syrian Ministry of Tourism projects an image of Syria as harmonious and cosmopolitan: at each region and each village that the festival makes a stop, the foreign diplomats and journalists are treated to a different 'taste' of local popular life and traditions: beginning at Damascus citadel, the audience experiences the city as it is imagined to have been during the Silk Road age: khans, horses, camels, local people mingling with sellers of all kinds (performed by Ornina dance

troupe), the meeting of different civilisations as represented by folklore dance troupes from China, Russia and Turkey.[14] In the Euphrates area, along global heritage archaeological sites such as the ancient city of Palmyra, the audience witnesses Bedouin dances and aspects of everyday 'traditional' life: al-Ujeili's folklore dance troupe from Raqqa treats the audience with fascinating *dabkeh* dances, theatrically directed to include aspects of everyday work and celebration, along with Bedouin women dancing with swords,[15] whilst the audience is further acquainted with 'unity in diversity' through the ancient civilisation of Mesopotamia, the urban high culture of Aleppo, and the relaxed Mediterranean life in the *sāḥel* (literally, coast) of Lattakia (Sabbagh 2009).

Through the tour of Syria's ancient monuments, the Silk Road Festival *mixes* ancient history with popular culture and folklore. Ancient history, although not directly mentioned within folklore dance performances, is nevertheless implied through at least their geographic proximity, with folklore performances that take place in ancient venues or historically significant venues such as the citadel of Damascus and the amphitheatre in Palmyra.[16] And, although ancient history alludes to specific time-periods, popular folklore performances are almost ahistorical in that they depict 'traditional' as both inside and beyond history, as static and exotic, something that could have 'started' a long time ago, but which also indefinitely continues today. This mixing of history and culture, provides the Silk Road Festival with a *grand narrative* that runs through it, connecting together every performance with every stop of the Festival. This grand narrative is constructed, amongst other things, in terms of a time-scale: linear and large, this time scale begins with the Ugarit alphabet, the Roman Palmyra, the Islamic civilisation and leads up today.[17]

This linear grand narrative that spans across millennia and civilisations is told with authority by *the authority*: not only does it include the authorised and sanctified version of history, connected in a convenient linear way, but it is intended to be listened to and exported out of the country through the media (as examples not only of Syria's rich heritage, but also of the government's ability to produce and entertain such an expensive and elaborate event):

> The annual event, which is organized by the Syrian Ministry of Tourism, is considered as one of most [sic] important tourism and media manifestations as it revives heritage and embodies dialogue

> among different cultures through the interaction among the participants, in addition to conveying a positive image about Syria and its magnificent tourist destinations.
>
> (Al-Jazaeri and Sabbagh 2010)

However, the issue of government's authority in presenting and representing history is generally viewed as an appropriate government policy by most Syrian citizens, who see such events as empowering in their underscoring of Syria's rich historical and cultural heritage, which appears undermined by the international audiences and media.[18] Told by the authority, this amalgam of ancient history and folklore traditions *legitimises* the ministry and state authorities in terms of history and culture, to speak for the different populations, religious and ethnic groups that inhabit Syria today, artistically bracketing outside class inequalities, poverty and forms of stratification, even though sometimes the historical and cultural claims appear rather extravagant (see Wedeen 1999). This legitimating is not only a self-fulfilling prophecy but in doing so, the state becomes the protector, the father-like symbol of Syria in past and in present.

The Silk Road Festival is mainly directed towards non-Syrian journalists and diplomats, and the Syrian government uses it as a platform for international diplomacy and image-making. For a festival that is designed as a tourist guide across Syria, it allows official policy to be 'marketed' as a successful paradigm of cosmopolitanism within the Middle East (see Hanley 2008) – as the place that is in direct opposition to sectarian and conflict zones of neighbouring Iraq and Lebanon.

Finally, the Silk Road Festival, in both its title and performances, is a powerful metaphor of the cultural, geopolitical and economic crossroads at which Syria is located. Using the metaphor of the 'crossroads' of civilisation and religions is not something new in Syria's foreign policy. Yet, the Festival through its tourist historical attractions and its folklore dance performances embodies this metaphor constructing a visual politics for the future of Syria as an important player in the struggle for the Middle East. This is not a recent political strategy, as Seale notes regarding Hafez al-Assad's policies in the 1980s:

> Syria's promotion of its rich archaeological past was part of Assad's exercise in nation-building. The often heard theme that history

> had placed Syria at the centre of the world was an indirect way of saying that it lay today at the centre of regional power and decision-making.
>
> (Seale 1989: 460)

Having explored how the Syrian state presents itself to external, international audiences as the heir to an unchanging and harmonious cosmopolitanism, let us consider how the state conducts its internal politics in local folklore festivals.

Case Study 2: A Local–Global Festival

> The state [. . .] is a bid to elicit support for or tolerance of the unsupportable and intolerable by presenting them as something other than themselves, namely, legitimate, disinterested domination. The study of the state, seen thus, would begin with the cardinal activity involved in the serious presentation of the state: the legitimating of the illegitimate.
>
> (Abrams 2006: 122)

The city of Idleb, green and tranquil, lies in the north of Syria, capital city of a municipality by the same name, bordering Turkey on the north and the municipalities of Aleppo and Lattakia. The municipality is known for its ancient history, its natural beauty, and also for its popular arts, heritage and traditions – especially its distinguished male wedding dances of sword and shield.

A folklore festival celebrating local Idleb and Syrian traditions was established here in 2007, by the Minister of Culture at the time, Dr Riad Nassan Agha, who himself comes from Idleb. In 2009 I attended the third 'Green Idleb's Festival for Popular Arts' (*mahrajān Idleb al-khaḍrā' lil-fonoūn al-sha'abiyyeh*) as a formal guest of the Directorate of Theatre and Music. Spread over nine days, the festival was organised by the Ministry of Culture's Directorate of Theatre and Music in co-ordination with the municipality (*moḥāfaẓa*) of Idleb and the local Cultural Centre (*al-markaz al-thaqāfī*). The main venue of the festival was the city's amphitheatre. Every night the festival would host two or three different folklore dance troupes and a musical concert (*ḥafleh musiqiyyeh*) by Syrian artists and well-known orchestras. For nine days the city of Idleb

resembled a micrographic image of a Syrian cultural cosmopolis. More than 16 dance troupes participated in the festival, interestingly as we shall later discuss, representative of most of Syria's municipalities and regions: Tartous, Lattakia, Ifrin (Kurdish village near Aleppo), Idleb (three dance troupes), Suwayda, Hashaka (two groups), Raqqa, Hama, Daraa as well as the state dance ensemble Ommaya. In 2009, the Idleb festival was part of wider cultural celebrations of Jerusalem (Al-Quds) as the cultural capital of the Arab world, and two Palestinian refugee troupes opened the festival. Although the festival is comprised of Syrian dance troupes, on the third day of the festival a Turkish dance troupe performed exceptionally as an honorary guest. Further to the main performances, the Cultural Centre hosted a book fair, painting and musical instruments exhibitions, as well as academic lectures regarding popular arts and heritage. Official organisers, dignitaries, participating groups and journalists were accommodated by the Directorate, and entertained with excursions, lunches and dinners. The festival was very well organised and covered widely by local and national media. On the first day, official speeches were made by the Mayor of Idleb and Dr Ajaj Salim, head of the Directorate, who noted that 'dance is the first and foremost shared human language'. Most impressive of all the speeches was the one delivered by the Minister of Culture, Dr Nassan Agha. In this section, I translate and analyse parts of his opening speech, because his Excellency's rhetoric underlines important points in the state's dialectics of addressing internal affairs and its subjects and citizens.

The audience greeted him warmly and enthusiastically, clapping and standing up for him. And his Excellency, talking without notes and looking the audience straight in the eye, delivered a powerful and passionate speech. Dr Nassan Agha's speech began with the ancient civilisations that had developed from this land in the historical past, moving to connecting the Syrians to the Arabs, to 'our friends' the Turks, and finally to the celebration of Al-Quds, through the predicament of a common cultural heritage. As for Idleb, his Excellency gave one of the most beautiful descriptions: 'in this beautiful land [of Idleb] the art was sown/fertilised and inspiration grew' (*bi hazihi al-'arḍ al-ṭayeba namat al-fanoūn wa kabura al-ibtidā*'). But the minister was quick to point out that art and creativity are not only for those who live in Idleb, nor for the Syrians, not even for the Arabs alone; they are to be shared and celebrated

by the whole of humanity: 'and this is why it is important that this festival takes place here – because this is the land of Culture'.

Dr Nassan Agha, moved beyond the rhetoric of culture and folklore to provide legitimacy for dance itself: 'they ask why a dance festival. We say yes, because we respect the popular arts which are the building blocks of our identity' (*hawiyya*). And from this very local festival with the very local audience, the Minister of Culture went further, challenging a monolithic view of identity by adding that popular arts 'take colours from the West, and from the East, and make multi-colour identities' reflecting a 'universal soul' (*roūḥ al-ummah*) reconciling the superficial divisions of religions, nations and locations.

The minister addresses the world from Idleb in a speech as general and humanistic so as to address a complex and 'colourful' humanity, a speech that celebrates cultural heritage as the base of a diverse and yet shared and common world. The minister in his speech does not mention the diverse social make-up of Syria, the 'colourful' religious, ethnic and regional identities that live within Syrian borders. However, the global humanity that he addresses in his speech could be a metaphor for a shared Syrian locality: inasmuch as humanity is made from a colourful array of peoples and cultures, so too is the internal heterogeneous make-up of Syria. Syria resembles a miniature globe, a place where people from different religious, ethnic and regional backgrounds are united in difference, where the festival's stage becomes the sanctioned place for the expression of difference, a place managed, controlled and watched by the state.

Should the minister have mentioned the internal heterogeneity of Syria, its diverse religious and ethnic minorities, he would have risked running counter to the secular Ba'thist rhetoric, and, even more precariously, he could have provided a public recognition to groups and to the problems that officially do not even exist, such as the Kurdish ethnic minority, but also the potentially threatening acceptance of sectarian identities. In a polity where religion is both instrumental and dividing, the Syrian state recognises only three religions: Muslim, Christian, Jew (officially excluding heterodox religious groups that often consider themselves as an altogether different religion, such as the Druze) and only one ethnicity: Arab (excluding Kurds and Assyrians). The socialist claims of the Ba'th Party have long withered from its practice and rhetoric; it is a secular Arab nationalism that the Party

publicly perpetuates. In terms of rhetoric and state policy, it emphatically refuses to recognise the existence of minorities. Not only would such recognition legally transform Syria into a country with minorities but it could dangerously empower not only separatist strands, but also popular demands for a more democratic representational government. Thus, if the state were to accept religious and ethnic minorities, it would inevitably have to accept itself as a minority government. Of course to say that Syria's problems and ruling composition are solely sectarian issues would be naive at best: not only has most of the Alawi population only benefited slightly from the regime, but also the regime's beneficiaries extend beyond sects to the ruling classes and the emerging urban businessmen – issues that have more to do with economic interests and class rather than sociologies of religion or tribal solidarities (see Haddad 2012). Thus, an acknowledgment of religious and ethnic diversity could on the one hand translate as an acknowledgement of sectarian and competing differences, and on the other hand, it could also unmask the sectarian and 'cult' mythical dimension of state power and thus strengthen, in the eyes of the audience, *political* and *economic* differences.

The 'world in a city' as much as 'Syrian worlds' is what the Idleb festival, the minister's speech and the diverse choreographies are best described as, insofar as the cosmos here is bounded upon the Syrian state sovereignty. A local, state-bound cosmopolitanism, then, rather than 'nationalism' seems more adequate to describe the festival in Idleb and by extension the internal cultural policies of the Syrian state. The state does not attempt to homogenise its ethnic and religious heterogeneous make-up; on the contrary, it promotes heterogeneity and 'difference', utilising a modern re-appropriation of cosmopolitanism (see Kant 1795; Harvey 2009; Gills 2005; Theodossopoulos and Kirtsoglou 2010) that sounds incredibly similar to the European Union's motif of 'unity in diversity'.

Towards a Definition of State-of-Empire

Empire (Ln. *imperium*) is derived from the Latin verb *imperare*, 'to command'. Interestingly, the Arabic word for empire comes from Greek (*aftoqratoria*). At the most basic definitional level, empire denotes a model of governance whereby different countries, states and nations are ruled over by one power. Historically, the term is associated

with the ancient Roman Empire, the empires of the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Empire, and also with the practices of colonialism, that is, the British Empire. Contemporary usage of the term is associated with the works of Hardt and Negri (2001), to denote the new de- and re-territorialising tendencies of global capitalism, by which the sovereign rights of nation states become surpassed by a new form of supranational world order (2001: 9–10; see Harvey 2009: 272 for criticisms). For the purposes of analysing the Syrian state's internal cultural policies, I use 'empire' as a conceptual tool in order to describe the tactics and methods of the state as 'the legitimate governance of and over *difference*'. These tactics and methods are some of the ways that the Syrian state attempts to represent itself and to gain legitimate consent from its population; it is not by any means the only tactic that the Syrian state uses. 'State-of-empire' is used as a foil to the nation state in order to highlight the differences of these two political strategic projects in regards to ruling over a polity. Thus, whilst nation states govern by imposing homogeneity (Anderson 1991; Scott 1998), state-of-empire constitutes, manages and is sustained by internal heterogeneity. Otherwise, why does a state that is renowned for being oppressive, authoritarian and inflexible spend so much time and effort on the maintenance, nurturing and reification of 'difference'? Nation state and state-of-empire are distinguished through the tactical utilisation of difference, the strategic manipulation of 'essentialisms' (Herzfeld 2005; cf. Spivak 1988), whilst both manipulate and construct the imagined and invented histories and traditions. However, where the nation state strategises an eternal homogenous and singular mythology that reifies the state as the eternal precondition of the nation, the empire utilises internal heterogeneity in order to fabricate the rhetoric of cultural harmony in which the state will become its guardian and necessary a priori. Therefore, whereas the nation state aims to obliterate difference, a state of empire aims to command difference, a difference that it itself creates as its *raison d'être* and which it controls in the name of empire. State becomes the legitimate ruler over a single nation, whilst the state-of-empire functions as the consensual ruler of multiplicities and legitimises itself through a reified co-construction of both 'state/emperor' and 'diversity'. In short, through the ideology and imaginary of *empire*, the state not only manages difference but renders difference possible only under its patronage.



Figure 5.3 The Kurdish troupe from Ifrin is awarded a national prize for their cultural contributions at the Idleb festival. Photograph by the author.

Part II: Choreographies of Empire: The State and the Nuptial Stage

This ideological strategy of the state-of-empire is choreographed in folklore festivals through the ritual of marriage. As a tactical union of marriage and dance, folklore festivals provide the spaces not only for the expression of sanctioned differences within the Syrian polity, but also become the spaces where both difference and intimacy are realised, since enacted, danced and embodied, these 'differences' become personal, tangible and palpable, whilst at the same time the Syrian state-of-empire becomes ever more elusive. In this part of the chapter, the tactical use of the marriage ritual is ethnographically described and analysed in order to portray how nuptial bodies become politically intimate, but also intimidated and intimidating. Through the ethnographic description of a folklore performance, I demonstrate how the Syrian state reifies itself through bodies and embodied struggles, and how the politicisation of the nuptial body as well as the negotiations of power are choreographed in folklore festivals.

Poetics of Empire: What's in a Marriage?

There were many weddings that week in Idleb. On stage, marriages in succession took place, coloured through the hues of regional troupes: Assyrian, Druze, Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'i, rural and urban. The folklore troupes danced their customs, costumes and traditions by performing their ritual marriages on stage. For most groups, the combination of folklore and dance necessarily meant marriage: marriage as the most celebrated rite of passage, a celebration enacted through dance, and dance that is sanctioned through the social ritual of marriage. As marriage legitimises a union between two peoples, in the contexts of festivals it provides legitimacy to the socially and religiously ambiguous act of dancing (van Nieuwkerk 1997 [1995]). Marriage rituals and ceremonials lend themselves easily to folkloric re-appropriations and theatrical adaptations as they are always already staged, even when not on stage, directed through re-appropriations of ritual practices, enacted through costumes, celebrated through the idiomatic extremes of separation and union. In Arabic, happiness (*faraḥ*) also means wedding



Figure 5.4 Toutoul dance troupe from Raqqa, winners of the Idleb folklore competition of 2009. Photograph by the author.

(*'urs*), and the wish 'to your happiness' (*faraḥak*) is given to unmarried youths as a wish for marriage. Dancing is considered an expression of happiness (van Nieuwkerk 1997). However, marriage is also 'happiness baked with sadness' since the union of the bride and groom presupposes the separation of the bride from her natal home, a separation forcefully and ritually enacted in most of Syrian weddings and on stage as 'taking the bride' (*jib al-'arūs*). Of course, Syrian marriages are elaborate and unbounded affairs (see Chapters 5 and 8). There exist many differences, rituals and practices regarding marriages across as well as between Syria's heterogeneous regions and communities. As a bundle of so many rites and traditions, marriage's attraction for folkloric exposes is clear: everyone does it, celebrates it, but also all do it in a different manner. It is a celebration of difference but of a difference that is widely known and understood: of differences common to most. In the year 2009, it was the young dance troupe Toutoul from the municipality of Raqqa, in north-eastern Syria, that captivated the audience and won the folklore competition. Below is an ethnographic description of their performance.

The Dance and the Marriage

The stage is set with a red chariot in the middle and a metallic *ṣaniyya* (tray). The music begins and on the stage, a woman appears dressed in Bedouin clothes performing a solo dance with the tray in her hands. Soon, more women join the dancer: they are all dressed in Bedouin garments of colourful layers of *galabiyyah* with long sleeves and silk headscarves (particular of Aleppo and Mosul). Amongst them, there is a singer with a microphone who starts singing live traditional Bedouin wedding songs, and another woman holding in her hand an elaborate incense burner (*mabkhara*, vessel for burning incense, *bakhūr*, used, amongst other occasions, in marriage ceremonies to purify the bride and drive away bad spirits). The group of eight women surround a beautiful girl that is dressed differently: she is wearing a long, black velvet *'abāyyah* embroidered in gold. Two men in Bedouin clothes make a grand entrance from the left and right of the stage, and perform a dance with spears. Women dancers surround the woman dressed in the black *'abāyyah*, and replace the headscarf (*mandil*) on her head with a *niqab* made of golden coins that covers the face except for the eyes, but leaves the long hair and the neck uncovered.[19] Because of these symbolic transformations, the audience infers that the woman in black is a bride

on the road to her marriage. The bride enters the chariot, and four men carry it on their shoulders whilst the women follow behind in a parade fashion singing songs and chanting *'āwīha.*

These are the first three minutes of an hour-long performance. The contexts are set less so by dancing and more by the exquisite use of readable and polysemic symbolism: the metallic tray as a symbol of the impending consumption of food and commensality that will take place during the later stages of the wedding, the *bakhūr* to purify the air and guard against evil spirits, the wedding chants, the differentiated clothes, and the symbolic dressing of the bride through the change of her ordinary headscarf to the golden *niqab* – a transformation from a girl to something blindingly mystical, expensive and elusive, tantalising and fearful. There is also the introduction of men, who at this stage interact little with the women. It is important to note that all this information obtained from the stage through symbols are readily accessible to the Syrian audience that watches the performance: costumes and ritual practices may vary significantly across Syria but the symbolism of nuptial transformation and transition are widely understood.

The first appearance of male dancers on stage was almost aesthetic, even though their performance was full of vitality. As the parade of the chariot continues, the women that follow the parade begin to dance with swords, and soon they are joined by men who dance with spears. Their dance is powerful and joyful at the same time, as the journalist next to me informs me that 'only Bedouin women are allowed to dance with swords!' The performance itself makes good use of this 'strategic essentialism' through the interplay of flexible masculinities and femininities that become idioms of power relationships rather than statically ascribed roles. Of course, Bedouin women are known as possessing the tradition of carrying arms and even going to war – a 'possession' directly derived from a moral cosmology of 'autonomy' ascribed and self-ascribed to the group as a whole rather than solely as a gender-related stereotype (Abu-Lughod 1986; Khalaf 1981). The direction of the dance performance plays eloquently with this stereotype: from early on five women follow the parade dancing with swords – this is also significant because these women might be part of the woman's or man's family escorting the bride to her new home.

The parade stops but the dancing continues: now women with swords occupy the stage and men with spears in a dance, interspersed from time

to time with female wedding *'āwīha.* They all dance solo and soon musicians accompany them on stage: a *darbokah* and a *mizmar*. The women leave their swords and start dancing with their veils – a foreshadow perhaps that not only does resistance have many faces but also power – occasionally making duets with the men. But a scarf is left on the front of the stage as the women retreat to the back, and two men are left to fight over it. A woman comes, as if to tease them, or to put them in order. And she makes them dance in the *dabkeh* circle.

A traditional coffee grinder is brought on stage: a big, elaborate wooden pestle and mortar, whose musical sound from the grinding of coffee makes a loud public invitation. As men ground the coffee, women bake bread on stage. These gender-specific practices are brought unobtrusively on stage, in a way of discreet interplay and intermixing. Soon enough, the female dancers are making bread whilst the male are dancing around them. Then, they bring a very big brass pan – another symbol of the impending commensality. In another subversive scene the bride with the golden *niqab* comes out of the chariot and dances with two swords in her hands in front of the bread-loaded tray. A beautiful, enticing and graceful dance, the bride takes almost the posture of an epic worrier or a monster: at the same time beautiful and out of reach.

And the dances continue. More group dances upon group dances – beautiful combinations of *dabkeh* including intermixed, women and men alone, in all different formations. More than half an hour of *dabkeh* accompanied by live music and the audience enchanted by both the direction and the choreographic act, as well as by the astonishing energy and enjoyment of the young dancers.

The performance finishes with more *dabkeh*, a *dabkeh* in which a couple from a different group joined and in which the choreographer and director of the group partook. From the excitement, a male dancer misjudged his moves and jumped, ever so gracefully, off the stage. Everyone enjoyed the performance, especially the journalists I was sitting with, who said that they finally saw something exciting. And the dance troupe, after their performance was completed, went around the audience with the tray full of bread and treated us (*dyāfa*).

As the dance performance finished amidst the clapping of the audience, I must admit I was somewhat perplexed. I had seen the bride, I had seen the symbols, heard the songs, even celebrated and eaten the

nuptial bread. But which one or where was the groom? Who got married in the end? Where was the union between the bride and groom?

Dancing Marriage on the State's Stage

Toutoul's performance contains many aspects that are shared across Syria, such as the commensality of coffee, dough and bread and of course dancing in the contexts of weddings. It also contains these folkloric elements that distinguish the performance as 'Bedouin', such as the costumes and the female sword dance performances. Many note that 'when folk dance is presented on stage it is no longer *folk* dance' (Ruyter 1995). In Toutoul's performance, however, relations between performers as well as between performers and audience are intersubjective, playful and fluid, in a way that makes the performance less 'folkloric' and more of a performative dance celebration. This celebration incorporates body transformations (the dressing of the bride), playful engendering (women with swords or teasing the men), and the making and sharing of social bonds through dancing as well as through consumption (bread and coffee are the traces of commensality and reciprocity). These processes not only happen in front of the audience but *with* the audience, as with sharing coffee and bread. In this way the performance accomplishes the uniting of ethnological and stereotypical colours of a Syrian Bedouin heritage with the forms and formations of the festival, celebrating a union of difference. A real wedding, then, but between whom?

The bride is a central aspect of the performance through her impressive transformation, her separateness in the chariot, her sword dancing. The groom, however, is at best indistinct: as male performers come and go, dancing and fighting, the groom is not distinguished by any specific ritual or rite of passage, and there is no one in particular that can be distinguished either through attire or attitude as the groom. Moreover, the performance itself finishes through a series of *dabkeh*, occupying 30 minutes, and no evident union of bride and groom. The bride stands as the lone metaphor for a union, recasting the groom as irrelevant, as even artistically 'excessive' on stage. In this way, she undergoes the social transformation of a body from a state of anonymity and potentially threatening sexuality, into the realm of socially sanctioned marriage and reproduction.

Through wedding rituals in Druze Jaramana, Chapter 4 explored the roles of bride and groom whose nuptial bodies are actually the least nuptial in the performance of the wedding ceremony, since from

singular, volatile, sexual bodies they are socially transformed through the embodied multiplicity of the surrounding social bodies, in a way that the nuptial body cannot make sense but only as the conversion and extension of the socio-political body politic. Toutoul's performance as a whole, as is the indistinctness of the groom, are more or less 'faithful' enactments of a wedding celebration in which emphasis is placed on the social multiplicity of reproduction through the enlargement of the bodies of bride and groom into the greater social categories.

In the parameters of state-sponsored folklore festivals the social ramification of this ritual intimacy is political micro-economics: not only does the audience become the invited guests of a wedding, but the audience and performers unite together as guests in a process that constructs the state as an invisible but always present *host*. Hosts and guests share a relationship of gifts, obligations and reciprocation. In this context, performers and audience simultaneously occupy multiple roles. The union between the stage and the amphitheatre comes to represent a nuptial union between two different groups from different regions. In this intimate process of embodiment, performers and audience turn into objects; they stand as metaphors for the bride and groom. Indeed, there is a cunning similarity between the lone bride in Toutoul's performance and the audience: through an objectifying gaze of the state, they both become the reversed idols for something larger than their bodies. The 'irrelevant' groom, now, becomes the elusive but ever-present Emperor-state, to whom both performers and audience consent to marry, thus consenting to create and reinforce it.

This marriage, however, is a marriage between persons already married: persons and bodies that have already undergone and partaken in their own communal, classed, ethnic and religious social nuptials. Here, the choreography of the festival attempts to imitate the nuptial choreographies of the different socio-political locales, in order to create a spatial geography of power relations. In a sense, the secular cosmopolitan state of the Syrian empire attempts to claim the nuptial intimacy out of religious or social connotations through constructing a template of relating. This circular and reifying narrative of intimacy makes the empire not the groom something more pervasive as well as perverse. It transforms the state-of-empire into an embodying nuptial space, a space that becomes the only precondition of all and any marriages. The state of empire becomes thus the patron and the guardian of unions as

well as the presumed foundation of a harmonious coexistence between dissimilars. Within the matrix of Syrian religious and ethnic heterogeneity, an intimate cosmopolitanism is realized by means more oppressive and subtle as it further baptises itself as the absolute precondition for even the possibility of marriage.

Conclusion: Harmony and the State-of-Empire

Promoting an internal cosmopolitan policy of 'unity in diversity', the Syrian state not only allows heterogeneity but actively encourages it through public spectacles such as folklore festivals. In these festivals, the similarity that is shared across the different participating groups is the stage on which they perform. The stage is also a precondition of the state-of-empire: it is only *this* space and stage on which difference must be presented. The cosmopolitanism of the Syrian Empire is based on the strategic use of diversity, heterogeneity and difference. However, this 'difference' is not any difference but is state-defined, sanctioned and regulated. A folklore festival, such as in Idleb, maps Syria through a geographic imaginary. This map is both eternal as well as in perpetual danger: mapping the imaginary of 'difference', the folklore festival presents differences that may be ethnic, religious, gendered and classed as a matter of *regional* variation that is inherent to the immortal continuation of the Syrian Empire. The festival, its presenters and performers never mention directly their religious, sectarian or ethnic affiliation. These affiliations are the results of the audience's intimate reading. However, on stage such differences are defined and categorised as *regional* differences.

Unlike so much of the anthropological literature on marriage and kinship, a literature of contracts, exchanges, legitimating of offspring and management of resources,[20] in folklore festival dance marriages, like in the mythical marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, it is the *space* that is important. It is through this space that the possibilities of an actual and mutual relationship between Olympians and humans takes place. And choreography, like power, needs space to be enacted. The state in folklore festivals is the *stage.* Space is instrumental for the palpability of power, and this simple reality in the myth is also applicable to policies of the state: for the state to exist it needs to be reified by its subjects. Here, it is space that plays an important role: it is through geography – spatial, bodily and rhetorical – that the choreographies of power may be

enacted – the President's portraits dominating the Syrian streets, the different regional groups dancing on the same stage, for example (see Harvey 2009; Mitchell 2006; Scott 1998; Shay 2002). It is in this space that the Syrian state plays its most intimate, and perhaps dangerous, game, utilising both aspects of the dance performance, that of marriage and that of choreography.

In the face of Harmony, a celebration of difference was consummated – a celebration of a nuptial union between Gods and mortals – she was marriage in that an elusive resemblance of *forms* actually fostered the difference between gods and humans to such an extent that the harmonious celebration would never cease to be repeated and imitated but at the same time could never be exactly reproduced. Harmony, in that instance, constituted the eternal phantom to marriage and to the state: a repressive expectation to follow nuptial unions. Thus, clumsy unions ensue under the haunting possibility of harmony.

Haunted by Harmony, the Syrian regime forges itself as a divine sovereign through the embodied practices of empire – enacted through the celebration of difference during its folklore festivals. From mythical to state-staged marriages, and from the burial of martyrs to the repositioning of intimacies, we may note that just as Harmony reinforces rather than dissolves distinctions, state folklore festivals do likewise: bringing the state and its subjects just close enough for the latter to realise its distance from the former. Folklore dance easily lends itself on the stage of carefully choreographed politics (Shay 2002), exposing, reinforcing and occasionally challenging the spectacular ambiguities of domination (Wedeen 1999), through a reification of the state (Abrams 2006; Herzfeld 2005; Mitchell 2006) spatially enacted and simultaneously constructed (Harvey 2009). This provides the spatial precondition for the forging of a social contract between the state and its subjects, dressed in cultural and cosmopolitan ideology. The Syrian choreographic politics of state-sponsored folklore festivals help to forge an idea of the state as the precondition for 'cultural' harmony within a bounded polity and territory. This cultural intimacy may bring the heterogeneous communities and sects of Syria together through different regional dance troupes in folklore festivals, assuming and recasting the 'state' as the precondition of heterogeneous coexistence. What happens when the stage collapses? In war, such cultural policies bring a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'it is us or it is (sectarian) chaos'.

CHAPTER 6

POWER, RESISTANCE AND YOUTH POLITICS

Introduction

Democracy, civil society and likewise their 'promotion' have for a long time shaped foreign policies inside as much as outside the countries of the Middle East. Since January 2011, however, these notions and policies have been challenged by a new emerging concept, the 'Arab Youth'. Whilst 'Arab Youth' is coined to denote the grass-roots nature of the uprisings, as a political category it may be reinforcing the paternalistic presumptions of authoritarian regimes and global hegemonic power structures, who use it to undermine the capacity of the wider population for democratic change. Without empirically grounded and theoretically challenging works, 'Arab Youth' may perpetuate the same inequalities and top-down misunderstanding that 'democracy promotion' connotes within the Middle East. By locating Syrian youth within contemporary struggles through ethnographic case studies, this chapter aims to sketch a nuanced, complex and colourful picture of the multifaceted ways that young people reinforce, resist and negotiate power relations in contemporary Syria. Although this chapter is structured around three case studies taken from young Syrians, I employ the term 'youth' in order to refer to a much needed paradigm shift in theoretical perspective of analysing the struggles that cross-cut the Middle East. In previous chapters, I have explored power relations within households, life-cycle events of a religious community, and how the state becomes the reified guardian of cultural

harmony through its cultural policies. In this chapter, I select three ethnographic paradigms from different communities of Damascus, and from a specific age category, because of my own positionality in it, in order to show the different ways that people relate, challenge and reinforce power. Specifically, I look at youth responses to different forms of authority such as external power (Israeli occupation), the Syrian state, and the authority of parents and sectarian communities.

Of Uprisings, Backgrounds and Theoretical Frameworks

Shortly after the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings and the ousting of their respective presidents, the expatriate Syrian activist Ammar Abdulhamid wrote an article for the *Guardian* titled 'Syria is Not Ready for an Uprising'. Amongst his arguments was the following:

> Syria is still suffering from the isolation it has experienced since the 1980s. As a result, the exposure of its people to the world outside their borders is relatively weak, at least in comparison with the situation in Tunisia and Egypt. Consequently, there are really no independent civil society institutions to speak of: no free unions, no independent student bodies, no active political opposition parties – in short, no structures that could enable people to organize themselves and rally others.
>
> (Abdulhamid 2011)

Much changed in the social and political landscape of Syria during the subsequent months of 2011, after local demonstrations in the agricultural prefecture of Daraa, hit by drought, economic deprivation and corruption, were bathed in blood in a futile and provocative show of force by the Syrian regime (Kastrinou 2011). Sites of fire sprung up throughout Syria in the months following, enhanced by the justified demands for change, by the Syrian state's numerous enemies, and by the state's own disproportionate and bloody reaction. In a rapidly shifting terrain, the promises of the 'Arab Spring' – a misnomer at best – turned grim, with fatalities numbering more than 2,000 by the end of summer 2011. Of course, neither Abdulhamid, nor others, could have foreseen what was about to happen. Although Syria shared with Tunisia and Egypt economic, demographic and political similarities such as the

rising cost of living, inflation, a high unemployment rate, a young population and an authoritarian 40-year-old regime, a 'youth uprising' seemed socially, politically and economically unlikely to take place in Syria. Below, I will briefly sketch the arguments of that narrative, as a prelude to problematising terms and theoretical frameworks such as 'civil society' and 'youth'. Then, the main section of the chapter will explore three ethnographic cases drawn from fieldwork conducted in Syria (2008–09, 2010) amongst Syrian youths between 20 and 35 years of age. These case studies not only bring a 'taste' of the challenges Syrian youths face, but also provide an empirically grounded framework from which to investigate the realities and potentialities of Arab youth politics. Further, these examples aid in framing the comparative ground on which a fruitful comparison can be made between Syrian and other Arab youth.

Background

At the start of 2011 the economic situation in Syria was bad, with the political and economic system favouring some groups over others, whilst recent policies of state-controlled liberalisation were resulting in the increasing accumulation of capital in the hands of the country's political and business elites. But central Damascus' American-style coffee shops, expensive restaurants and the few shopping malls that host the high-end designer clothes were only just emerging, whilst the government still subsidised basic foodstuff, *mazot* (heating oil), healthcare and education. The contradictions of a socialist (only in name) system and of liberal economic reforms were there, but so was the pretext of a social government, and the cliental systems that create dependence. The Syrian economist Dr Salam Said noted in an interview:

> The economic situation is bad [in Syria], but still is not that bad as in Egypt. The middle class in Syria is disappearing, but is still relatively significant. The effects of liberalization are taking place slowly. Decisions related to subsidies and liberalization policies are designed to serve the interest of economic and political elites, but also to keep a minimum of popularity for the government.
>
> (Said, 20 February 2011)

Politically, too, Syria shared with Egypt and Tunisia an autocratic repressive regime. Similar to Egypt, the army functions as a powerful

military and political institution,[1] directly involved in the government – the Baʻth Party came to power in 1963 through a military coup – and provided the president, who became president under an internal party power struggle, with the support of the army in what is known as the Corrective Movement of 1970. Like the former regimes of Tunisia and Egypt, Syria has little respect for human rights or freedom of speech. State brutality against opposition climaxed in the early 1980s when the army was deployed to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood, killing thousands and bombing large parts of Aleppo and most of Hama. More recently, after Hafez al-Assad's death in 2000, and the succession to the country's presidency of his son Dr Bashar al-Assad, there were signs of political democratisation that culminated in what is known as Damascus Spring. These signs included the release of some political prisoners, some limited freedom of expression and political debate by main opposition figures. Yet, Damascus Spring was as short-lived as its fading signs and soon turned into Winter: less than a year had passed when major opposition personalities were imprisoned and political movements banned (George 2003). Like many authoritarian regimes, there was strong control over print and televised media, restrictions regarding the internet,[2] and an overwhelming popular discourse contesting the pervasiveness of the *mukhābarāt*, secret police, with close ties with the Syrian army.

However, more so than Egypt and Tunisia (and many other Middle Eastern regimes), Syria had successfully integrated internal and foreign polices in a way that Syrian foreign policy internally legitimises the regime.[3] Adopting a resistance discourse, Syrian foreign policy employed a narrative that is firmly pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel and anti-imperialist Western domination – and its puppet regimes – in the Middle East. A long-time ally of Iran, a supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah, the Syrian regime had always branded itself under the banners of Pan-Arabism and resistance to Zionist and external forms of domination (Hinnebusch 2001). As the banner of the ultimate resisting Arab regime, and as a state whose land is still occupied by Israeli forces in the Golan Heights, Syrian foreign policy not only legitimises the continual implementation of the Emergency Law, but, perhaps more importantly, represents the popular voice of the Syrian people who do see resistance to Israel and the USA as necessary for the maintenance of an ever so elusive Arab dignity. This means that although the regime did

face internal opposition, it also enjoyed wide-ranging popular support in regards to its foreign policies. In short, Syrian popular opinion and state policy are roughly on the same line: 'unity, freedom, socialism' was a slogan I heard frequently, although not always seriously, amongst the working-class older generation.

Furthermore, Syria's socio-political composition was very different from that of Tunisia and Egypt. Often described as the 'cradle of civilisations and religions' (in state rhetoric), Syria is a very heterogeneous state compromising diverse religious (Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, Alawi, Druze, Isma'ili) and ethnic groups (Arab, Kurdish, Armenian, Circassian), divided across a complex array of regional and class-based borders (Antoun 1991). Having experienced first-hand the devastation of foreign occupation and sectarian violence from the Iraqi refugees (Syria is the largest host country for Iraqi refugees), most Syrians, it seemed, supported the 40-year-old secular political system. And although the Ba'thist regime had been described as sectarian in favouring the Alawi sect's reign of power (van Dam 2011), the government's policies, perhaps due to the necessity of counterbalancing sectarian-based opposition and public opinion, had been notably pro-Sunni (with the exception of the army and security forces, see Landis 2007 for excellent research on Syrian state rhetoric in school textbooks). Actually, the Syrian regime had been so successful in intermixing sectarian politics and regionalism with cultural heritage and a distinct kind of Syrian nationalism, that it has been able to perpetuate a persuasive cosmopolitan rhetoric reinforcing a political attitude as a hegemonic but harmonious 'empire' under which Syrians are both nationals and different (cf. the EU's 'unity in diversity') – this for example, is most clearly represented through the lavish cultural festivals and other cultural projects that the state undertakes (see Kastrinou Theodoropoulou 2011; Seale 1989: 459–60; Wedeen 1999: 18–24; Cooke 2007: 19–35).

Finally, a Syrian popular uprising seemed unlikely not only because of economic and political legitimisation of the regime, but also because opposition parties and movements were thought unable to mobilise wide-ranging popular support. The Syrian polity was frequently criticised for its lack of civil society and opposition movements,[4] an impairment that was politically connected to a repressive 'police' state. However, as in the cases of Tunisia and much more Egypt, to base the success of a popular uprising on the weakness or strengths of internal struggles of the military/security

apparatuses seems unfair if not wholly disempowering for the millions of protesters. What is usually described as the Syrian opposition was a rather diverse and fragmented body of actors (Pace and Landis 2009). Certain factions within the pre-war opposition included banned political parties (i.e. one of the two communist parties, Nasserist, nationalists), whilst others were more clearly elite class-based movements (for an example of the resistance movement within the urban Sunni elite, see Salamanda 2004), thus opposition movements had little impact on discussing or reflecting the vast Syrian majority of lower-middle- and working-class people who in the years between 2000 and 2011 had been hit the hardest from both draught and economic neoliberalisation.

Syria might have been economically managing, socially heterogeneous, politically somewhat legitimate and in terms of its opposition forces fragmented, but it was not shielded from popular uprisings. If 'civil society' was exterior and lacking in Syria, as Abdulhamid put it, how could an uprising take place in the first place? And, to what extent might young people play a role in making or breaking a regime or an uprising?

Theoretical Frameworks

Abdulhamid's use of civil society to mean formal and 'modern' institutions that either exist or do not exist within a given society is similar to the definition of civil society by Gellner (1994), in which civil society is the result of a capitalist market economy, and of Western modernity. But greater scrutiny from case studies within the Middle East (Zubaida 2001) and from a wider variety of cultures and historical time-periods (Layton 2006), draws into question the view of civil society as a recent phenomenon. For example, in relation to Syria, Watenpaugh demonstrates how the emerging bourgeois classes at the turn of the twentieth century in Syria strived to re-appropriate a classed Western-dominated modernity through the creation of civil society organisations, such as the scouts (2006: 279, 294), noting that 'being modern' not only required the creation of social spaces, but also the invention of new social classifications such as 'youth' (Watenpaugh 2006: 294; cf. Hobsbawm 1995 [1975]: 270–92). Similarly, Mitchell shows that during late nineteenth-century colonial Egypt, 'Cairo's youth' posed a challenge to both colonial authorities and to the local emerging middle classes,[5] because they were viewed as obstacles to the discipline of the population.

Nancy Lindisfarne, an anthropologist with years of fieldwork research in Syria and the wider region, argues that the only way to critique as well as to synthesise a theoretical framework that is relevant to realities on the ground is by 'starting from below' (Lindisfarne 2002). Starting from below, in this chapter I explore ethnographic situations in which Syrian youth negotiate different forms of power and authority. These empirically grounded encounters of power and resistance offer a nuanced and colourful picture, simultaneously along challenging dominant perceptions regarding the exteriority of democracy and civil society, and the recent vague inventions of 'youth' as a de-contextual political force. I employ the term 'youth' not to generalise or essentialise a profoundly large category of people of a similar age, but in order to underline the complexities and challenges of a large segment of the Syrian population, of which, because of my research and because of my age, I came to know intimately well. 'Becoming young' points to the problematic re-invention of youth as a convenient political strategy during the historic shifts that shape the Arab world. More importantly, however, it is a call not to the 'Arab Youth' (if this can ever be a category) but for the need for a change in the ways that knowledge production regarding the Middle East operates. A call to arms for academic engagement to become young: colourful, nuanced and radical.

Singing Jowlan: Performing Identities, Reforming Histories and Embodying Politics

Bayna Rita wa 'oyoūnī bunduqiyya // wa alazi ya'rifu Rita // yanḥanī wa yuṣalī // li ilāhin fil 'oyūnī al 'assaliyya
'Between Rita and my eyes – a rifle / and he who knows Rita / kneels and prays / to the god in the eyes of honey'
(poem by Mahmoud Darwish, music by Marcel Khalife)

Sami has just been awarded a BA degree in English Literature from Damascus University. He is 25 years old – handsome, confident and extroverted. He is from the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights (pronounced Jowlan in the Syrian dialect). He is Syrian. His religion is Druze. It is the beginning of April 2009 and Sami is hosting a goodbye party in his

student flat in Mezzeh. He is returning tomorrow to the Golan Heights. For good. Or until peace is signed by Syria and Israel.

The Golan Heights have been occupied by Israeli forces since the Six-Day War in 1967, and the majority of the Syrian Druze population residing in the fertile mountain has declined Israeli offers of citizenship. As Syrian nationals under occupation, residents of the Golan do not have identity cards or passports but 'travel documents': 'we live under occupation and travel like dogs,' noted Mamduh, a Syrian Druze sociology student from Golan. Syrian nationals of either side of the border cannot move freely between the two territories, if and when such movement occurs it is usually permanent.[6] There is one exception to this rule: a student from Golan may study for a university degree in Syria, and can return to Golan for two months every summer for the duration of the study period. When the student completes her/his degree, as in Sami's case, it is time to return, for good, back to the occupied Golan Heights.

Sami's flat is full of his friends, a couple of his relatives (those who permanently reside in Syria), as well as the conspicuous universal signs of a good student party: plenty of alcohol, a couple of water pipes, friendly banter, singing and dancing. The singing starts with old and famous Arabic songs, *tarab* music, and people take turns in leading a song. Then someone starts singing Sabah Fakhri's *Ya māl al-Shām* and couples take to the dance floor. Soon dances interchange between couple-dancing (a variant of Oriental dance) and group *dabkeh*s.

To dance is to perform and embody intersubjective relations, forging relations between the performers, the audience and the performers, whilst using the body not as a simple medium of expression but as the physical tactile horizon of experience, an interface whose boundaries are always under construction, a space that embodies multiple identities (see Cowan 1990). Through dancing, a different geography of space arises, a geography that physically expresses relations of belonging and in which dance becomes a 'moral obligation to reciprocate a sign of closeness [. . .] the duty to dance is represented as an exchange' (Van Aken 2006: 214). In manifesting interconnections and social exchanges, dancing in Sami's party constituted, maintained and reinforced relationships of intimacy between Sami and his Syrian friends, friends that were Muslim, Christian and Druze, creating and negotiating a space where religious identities and internationally contested borders are transgressed.

Someone, here or there, in the middle of dancing would exclaim 'Ya Jowlan!' or 'Ya Sami!' As the night and dances moved on, references to the Golan Heights and to Sami became more frequent and more acute. The musical repertoire had now changed to include Druze traditional songs, alongside other Arab and Syrian ones. Suddenly, I realised that most if not all the songs sung and danced were relevant to Sami, relevant to the Golan Heights, and relevant to present-day politics: not only were there specific songs from the Druze of Golan, but the participants, by way of shouting or by inserting or changing lyrics to popular songs, made all songs and dances of the night relevant to a historic as well as a present-day context. Identities were 'mixed', rearranged and reshuffled, combined as in an artistic re-appropriation of a traditional carpet. But the colours and designs, the complex identities and borders, were not collapsed into each other, or simplified. They were reconnected or choreographed in a way that they kept their multiplicities and their contradictions. History was not simply embodied through dance: it was remade into a politicised present.

By performing war songs and dances with reference to a historic Druze past, party participants were validating Golan as simultaneously Druze and Syrian. Druzeness can be understood in both sectarian terms and the community's 'particularism' (Betts 1988; Firro 1992) to be a politically suspicious engagement, but also it can be understood within the contexts of Arab Syrian diversity and can be used for nation forging. By singing and dancing about both Druze and Syrian/Arab contexts, Sami and party participants, the particularism of the local community was strongly attached to a Syrian/Arab polymorphous ideal, constituted and united against a common external enemy (Israel), and thus through dancing history to establish performatively a relation amongst the community but also between the community and the rest of the Syrian Arab Republic, and so, in a way reinforcing the primary means of state rhetoric.

And then came Rita:

> 'Between Rita and my eyes – a rifle / and he who knows Rita / kneels and prays / to the god in the eyes of honey'

And I kissed Rita
When she was young

And I remember how she clung on to me
And how my arm was covered by the loveliest of braids
And I remember Rita
The way a sparrow remembers its puddle
Ah, Rita
Between us a million sparrows and images
And many dates
Fired at by a rifle
Rita's name was a feast in my mouth
Rita's body was a wedding in my blood
And I was lost in Rita for two years
And for two years she slept on my arm
And we made promises
Over the most beautiful of cups
And we burned in the wine of our lips
And we were born twice
Ah, Rita! I could not turn my eyes from yours
Except for two naps and honey-coloured clouds, before this rifle
Once upon a time
Oh, the silence of dusk
In the morning my moon migrated to a faraway place
Towards those honey-coloured eyes
And the city swept away all the singers
And Rita
Between Rita and my eyes – A rifle

A combination of love and war, on a theme that runs across the spectrum of the personal made political and vice versa, this is a very popular and powerful song *Rita wa al-bunduqiyya* written by Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish and sung by Lebanese composer and singer Marcel Khalife. The speaker grows up with 'Rita', falls in love with her, they are involved in a passionate relationship for two years, until the 'rifle' comes between them, destroying a city, sweeping away all its singers. The last stanza is particularly interesting (and hard to translate) as it starts with the phrase '*kān ya makān*' (Once upon a time or literally there was a place), a phrase used to begin stories with, especially fairy or epic tales, but not to end them. In this stanza, a narrative outside the relationship between speaker and 'Rita' emerges (it runs throughout the

poem but it is here that it becomes clear) describing how this 'rifle' sweeps away both Rita and the singers – both of which are emblems of happiness (*faraḥ*), and intellectual or inspirational activity. My Syrian friends explained to me that 'Rita' might have been an Israeli woman with whom the poet might have had a romantic relationship until the 1967 war separated them. Other elaborations or interpretations include that Rita might have been killed by an Israeli rifle, or that Rita was Israeli and subsequently became a rifle, another interpretation is that the speaker himself took a rifle and killed Rita (presumably because they found themselves in opposing battlefields). The mastery of Darwish's poem, so elegantly and ingeniously written, is that it permits and accommodates all these interpretations; subsequently one of the poem's successes is precisely allowing multi-layered meanings to emerge. In doing so, and particularly by not assigning any agency to the rifle (or to anything else in the poem), the poet succeeds in vividly portraying a situation, a context, in which individuals are forced or swept along, and where the city seems to have the agency to do so. Yet, the fatalistic inclination of the poem is to some degree overcome in the last stanza: it is only in the last lines of the poem that the speaker starts telling the story of the city, the singer and the rifle. Presumably, this is because the story has not yet finished.

Thus 'Rita' is polysemic, almost emblematic. During Sami's party, 'Rita' gave way to something else:

> *Bayna khāli wa 'oyoūnī bunduqiyya:* 'Between my uncle and my eyes – a rifle.'[7]

The first stanza was altered and sung solo by Sami's cousin, Sakher, married and residing in Damascus. We were all sitting in a circle, and were stunned by the different turn that the familiar song took. The two cousins will probably never see each other again, separated by the Israeli occupation, the only chance to see each other would be at the border between Syrian Quneitra and occupied Majdal Shams. Physical distance, a no-man's land between, and rifles pointing either side. The family idiom was exaggerated by inserting 'uncle' instead of romantic love, and by Sakher's performance directed to his cousin. And whilst the separation of lovers is painful, the separation of families is deemed not only unnatural, but tormenting both on personal and social levels (see Rugh 1997).

Since Darwish's poem already ventures to bridge the space between the personal and the political, the insertion of the family idiom adds another dimension. By doing so, Sakher not only exposes the unnaturalness of families separated by borders; thematically, he transforms the popular song from a love song into the more traditional repertoire of war songs (see Hood 2007), which usually evoke and revenge family separations and affairs. Thus, the alteration of the song does not only add the familiar dimension, but thematically relates it to all the previous traditional war songs that had been sung.

As the song contains references to the 1967 Six-Day War, the historic references for the Druze inhabitants of the Golan Heights are more than relevant. But, in a way this is not a song about history, in the sense that it is not about what happened some time in the past – this is a song about what is happening now, it's a song about living the history. Performatively adjusted to the current contexts, the song is both creative and contemporary as it relates Sami's situation, a metaphor for the occupation, within the present-day 'interests' of Syrian youth, a metaphor for the specific song's popularity. Inserting the historical and family specific context into the song, though, also does something else: where traditional Druze and Syrian songs talked and related to war, fight and occupation, this song, not particularly Druze or Syrian or revolutionary, is related. Therefore, it is not that specific songs can be made relevant, but that *any* and *all* songs can be turned into a narrative of contemporary power relations, between states and between individuals. In this way, neither the inhabitants of the Golan Heights nor their Syrian relatives and friends are disempowered by the status quo: by making history contemporary they create relations across borders, generations, genres of music and dance, and through these performances they challenge and resist both essentialised views of history and tradition as well as the imposition of a predestined politics. They are making traditional themes, like those of war songs, relevant to their everyday experience, they are challenging history by performing it, and they construct relations that are transgressions across borders, bridging the personal, the communal and the particular (Druze) with the national and the international. This process of re-invention of both tradition and modernity, local and global, is similar to what Van Aken calls 'the daily re-invention of *dabkeh*' (2006: 218):

> *dabkeh* is continually reinvented and the variations that occur create symbolic markers between different generations of men, but also between different criteria of belonging and fashions followed by young men.
>
> (Van Aken 2006: 219)

We sung and danced at Sami's party, and we sung and danced at the Quneitra border near Majdal Shams on 17 April, the Syrian National Day. And our dancing meant that nothing is final as long as relationships are forged, created and maintained across different borders. This is done not with 'as if' politics (Wedeen 1999), it is done through embodied performative relations. History and songs and politics and dances and identities are performed as a means of both making and maintaining relationships and preparing for battle, a theme pervasive in traditional Druze songs of war. Thus, instead of seeing history or identities as stories or banners static and of the past, young Syrians from either side of the border transgress internationally contested frontiers by performing and thus making and remaking their past, present, future as well as the frontiers themselves.

The Syrian Arab youth are located within complex webs of identities and politics, and they not only have agency in writing and telling their stories, but they have the potential of changing history and politics through their embodied dances and intertextual songs.

On Inventiveness and (In)Dependence: The Political Economy of Networking in Damascus University and Beyond

Arab youth and especially university students played an important role in the 2011 revolutions of Egypt and Tunisia (although it is reductionism at best and often patronising to describe the wide-ranging popular mobilisation as a 'youth revolution'). In the previous example, we saw an instance of how young Syrian students negotiate, crystallise and challenge complex identities, histories and politics through embodied practices. In this section we will look at the complex milieu of university life in Damascus and through the example of a specific type of networking we will analyse the ways in which a form of civil society and its political economy may pose challenges to different forms of domination.

Student life in the University of Damascus is as heterogeneous and varied as life outside of it. Regional, religious, class, gendered and political affiliations play out in and between lectures, exams and gatherings. Formally, there is an elected student representative body, the Student Commission, that negotiates student demands and there are several youth parties represented such as Ba'th, and other parties represented in parliament, along with more religious-based affiliations (that are not official parties). Upon entering the university students are invited to join organisations and parties, and I often heard that students joined the Ba'th youth party in order to 'have less trouble' or an 'easier time' during their studies, or 'better networking with professors'.

In the heterogeneous setting of Syria, where the political interacts with the social and the economic on a constant basis, it is very hard, almost impossible to separate these spheres of constant interaction in the everyday lives of Syrians. The Syrian state (and for 'state' I have in mind Foucault's understanding of the modern 'welfare' state) lies in some respects, on the fringes of the everyday life of Syrians – the life of the Syrian family or businessman – in that contrary to developed capitalist welfare states, it has few resources to provide certain services and facilities (such as adequate pensions, unemployment benefits, social insurance; almost one-third of Syrian economy comes from the informal sector). In this context, relationships are both personal and very important. Thus, it is not surprising to note that capital, social and economic, is generated through personal relations – *'alāqāt*. From the mundane to the sublime, relations in Syria directly affect all spheres of interaction, performing the role of a Syrian insurance system. It is through relationships that people reinforce family, communal and religious solidarity, it is through relations that people make their businesses or find work – thus, personal relationships not only inform but form social life in providing simultaneously and interdependently social as well as economic capital. One ingenious Syrian example of forming and maintaining relations is the practice of *jama'iyya*. This example challenges perceptions of Syrians as having a 'dependence culture' upon the public sector, as well as claims for a *lack* of civil society in Syria.

Literally, *jama'iyya* (pl. *jama'iyyāt*) means a social gathering or grouping; formally it denotes an institutional organisation, association or charity.[8] More commonly however, *jama'iyyāt* are informal groups,

neither registered nor affiliated in any way with the state. In the informal context, a *jama'iyya* is a social gathering of a standard number of people (it can range from 3 or 4 to more than 100), which meets in a scheduled manner (i.e. once a week, a month, etc.), requires membership in the *jama'iyya* group, and usually entails an agreed fee which is payable at every gathering, in a rotational manner, to a different member of the group each time. These socio-economic groups are pervasive[9] in urban Syria,[10] and are usually comprised of networks of friends, family members, members of a specific occupation, or neighbours, sometimes cross-cutting religious or ethnic divides, constituting what Dr Said (2011) called 'an alternative to savings account or insurance'.

Functioning as a rotating credit association, a school or university student could create a *jama'iyya* with three other friends; they could meet every week on a designated day, let's say on a Thursday, and every Thursday each would give 50SYP (£0.68) to the *jama'iyya*, and the sum of the money (200SYP or £2.73) would go to one of the members of the *jama'iyya* and s/he could use it as pocket money. The next week, the same amount of money would go to another member, so that by the end of the month all members of the *jama'iyya* would have rotated. These organisations usually range in numbers, frequency of meeting, as well as in fees: ranging contributions can be from 50–50,000SYP (£690), or even more.[11] Another example is *jama'iyya al-'āyleh*, *jama'iyya* of the family. For example, in the working-class family I lived with, the married daughters and sons held weekly gatherings with their children and spouses, on a rotational manner, in their houses (14 members and their children). In this *jama'iyya* no fees were paid directly, but the host family of the week would reciprocate with food. This would provide maintenance of family and extended family bonds through a scheduled pattern, sociality as well as sharing of food costs and relaxation for the women who were invited. However, the *jama'iyya al-'āyleh* of a neighbouring middle-class family included 20 female relatives, they would meet once per month, the hostess would change every month and it would be her that would receive the fees, each had to pay 1,000 SYP (£14), which meant that for any given month, a woman could have as spending money the quite extravagant in Syrian contexts amount of 20,000 SYP (£273 – this is equivalent to the monthly salary of an experienced and well-paid civil servant!). The usual meeting place of

jama'iyyāt is the host's house, in the case of students that could be university and coffee places.

It is a stereotype that Damascenes are incessant businessmen, and this stereotype finds an ingenious way of manifesting itself not only by the existence of informal organisations but also through the pragmatic explanations of *jama'iyyāt* that Syrians themselves give. The concept of deriving benefit (*istafāda*) plays an interesting role in this instance: contrary to (but not necessarily contradicting) the capitalist idea of benefit as economic profit, especially as the accumulation or concentration of capital, the concept of *istafāda* signifies a type of ongoing relationship, more closely related to Mauss' idea of gift-giving and reciprocity: it does not produce any profit but it is a kind of saving. Therefore, two complementary reasons are given by Syrian informants regarding the function and existence of *jama'iyyāt*.

First, there are social benefits (*fa'ida ijtimā'iyya*) to *jama'iyya*, including: the maintenance of social relationships that are harder to uphold otherwise in the busy rhythms of urban life; an organised but informal space of sharing news and expression; it is often said that *jama'iyyāt* have become the modern day *ḥammām*s (public bathhouses) in which gossip and searching for appropriate marriage partnerships can take place; and finally, they provide a nice excuse to evade or postpone other commitments. Some *jama'iyyāt* have a social aim such as those created by neighbours for maintenance of communal spaces. This creation of communal, shared spaces between household and state is a classic example of civil society (Layton 2006).

Financial benefits (*fa'ida mādiyya*) include: 'helping each other economically'; 'a way to help each other without involving the government or the bank' (most people in Syria do not have direct dealings with banks and avoid direct dealings with government officials as well); and 'better than the bank (borrowing from the bank) because it doesn't have interest'. Said noted, that:

> private banks with giro-account appeared just a few years ago in Syria. State banks were not capable of offering this kind of accounts with check systems (like in France) or money automat (like in Germany or the UK). Also as a saving account, one should note that people and the private economic sector didn't (do not even now) trust the state [. . .] They don't want to show off their

> money [. . .] The private sector has suffered from the 'nationalisation' process in the past.
>
> (Said 2011)

Khalaf (1981) places the concept of *jama'iyya* in the anthropological literature as state-organised and manipulated in order to draw a popular base of support and mobilisation in centres and peripheries of state power. In such forms, *jama'iyyāt* translate as collectives or cooperatives (see also Hinnebusch 1990; Batatu 1999). The formal establishment of these organisations begins in the period of the struggle and consolidation of the Ba'th party (1966–70), the ruling regime in Syria. Historically, by tracing informants' narrative accounts, the establishment of informal *jama'iyyāt* roughly corresponds to the period after this consolidation of state power, during the early 1980s – a period in which Syrian society and economy experienced unprecedented change both in relations of power and government, as well as in economic developments signified by rapid urbanisation, changes in the fabric of social life (fragmentation, physical and social mobility, immigrants, refugees) and other changes (redistribution of wealth, agrarian laws, implementation of policies) which reflect the political and economic hierarchies and priorities of the time. In the face of such changes, the state in terms of services, facilities, welfare and economy, was very limited in what it could offer, whilst people experiencing those changes found ways to not only adapt but to 'benefit' from the situation. In creating *jama'iyyāt* Syrian urbanites were able to respond to some of the demands of this new field by creating ad hoc, self-organised networks and groupings that to some extent fulfilled certain social and economic necessities.

But, is the newly invented *jama'iyya* something completely new to Syria? And how is it that, based on my research, the above-mentioned informal *jama'iyyāt* seem to be a specific urban engagement?

Albert Hourani, a leading historian of the Middle East, writes about the medieval Arab city:

> The quarter belonged to its inhabitants, and in a sense was an extension of the houses. Its privacy was protected, in case of need, by its young men, sometimes organised into groups [. . .] which had a continued existence and possessed a certain moral

> ideal. [. . .] There was a tendency for the inhabitants of a quarter to be linked by common origin, religious, ethnic or regional, or by kinship or intermarriage; such links created a solidarity which might be strong.
>
> (Hourani 2005: 123)

Shiham Tergerman (1994) beautifully depicts relationships between family and neighbourhood in her autobiographic book *Daughter of Damascus*, whilst Salamandra, an anthropologist, more recently comments on the political 'old Damascus revivalism' (2004: 106) especially as depicted through soap operas about everyday life in the quarters of Old Damascus (Salamandra 2004: 105–24; Salamandra 2005). The Arabic term for a quarter or a neighbourhood is *ḥāra* and during my fieldwork the most famous reviving Old Damascus soap opera was called *Bab al-ḥāra* (Gate of the neighbourhood) and was taking place during the French occupation of Syria, whilst the specific quarter of the old city was the last neighbourhood resisting the French.

The residential unit, in fact the spatial physical proximity of residence, has historically provided an additional network of reliance, support, as well as conflict in Syrian urban places. Neighbouring relations have always acted as forces of multiplication of other 'ties that bind', that is, as a means of sociality and solidarity in addition to other ties such as kinship, ethnic, religious, etc. The neighbourhood then, as extension of households and ties, has been multiplying 'relationships' through physical proximity. Interestingly, such relationships between neighbours have decreased but are still manifest in the older, usually poorer quarters of the city. For example, during my residence in *bayt* Abud-Haddad, whose house is more than 100 years old, and their neighbourhood is one of the oldest in Jaramana (see Chapter 3), in August we received gifts of fruit and vegetables on several occasions from neighbours who have cultivated land. These 'gifts' are called *khair al-seneh* (blessing of the year), are the first fruits of the land, and are exchanged and reciprocated ritually.[12] Furthermore, the more recent *jama'iyya al-hadīqa* or *jama'iyya nisowān al-ḥāra* are organisations explicitly based on the neighbourhood and residential unit.

Thus, it would be somewhat unfair to say that the formation of *jama'iyyāt* is a wholly new phenomenon, a direct result of the modern

urban historical contexts of Syria. Maybe it wouldn't be too audacious if we were to hypothesise that genealogically the newly invented *jama'iyya* lies with the token of neighbouring relations as these developed through time and history, under the specific social and economic fabric and pressures of urban life, in which proximity is physically 'forced upon', as are also other kinds of relationships, but which such a physical condition is less likely to be found outside the urban space. Nevertheless, the *jama'iyya* is not simply another word to describe what could be called the '*ḥāra sha'abiyyeh taqlīdiyyeh*' (Khalaf personal communication 2010) – the traditional popular neighbourhood, if such thing ever existed or ever ceased to exist.

From genealogical proximities, to the historical, political and socio-economic development, the practice of *jama'iyyāt* underlines a Syrian inventiveness and efficiency in creating spaces and organisations that occupy the in-between space of state and household (couldn't this space be translated as civil society? See Layton 2006). In this respect, the *jama'iyya* plays a role parallel to the state, and at the same time beyond the reach of the state by combining simultaneously the political with the social and the economic with the personal. As such, we could argue that through such organisations based on the ongoing promise of personal ties and trust, Syrians potentially, but not necessarily, undermine the authority of the state and the extent to which it can affect their everyday lives.

However, following the same line of argument, the *jama'iyya* can be undermining an even more pervasive form of authority, sometimes theorised as the most powerful form of relating not only in Syria but in the Middle East as a whole, and instead of multiplying relationships, could be seen as transgressing them to such an extent as to break or divide them. I am referring to relations of authority and dependence as manifested through the ties that bind much more pervasively and unquestionably than any state power, those of family and sectarian relationships, which will be further explored in the next section.

Love and Other Crimes: Desires and Discourses of Resistance

We are sitting at a coffee shop, my friend Anna and I, talking about – well, things that girls our age talk about . . . such as men, boyfriends and

sex. In discussing sexual encounters outside of wedlock and outside Anna's religious and regional affiliations, she notes:

> With my logic and my head I can see that I do nothing wrong in having relationships outside marriage, with so-called 'inappropriate' or 'forbidden' suitors [...] I know, I understand that all these are dead, backwards Oriental traditions that make no sense. But still, I can't help feeling somehow ashamed that I do these things [...] I guess the problem is that I have Orientalism in my head.

Echoing Anna's auto-exotic[13] self-criticism, in *What is* Really *Wrong with the Middle East*, Brian Whitaker states:

> 'Arab society,' Halim Barakat, the Syrian-born sociologist wrote, 'is the family generalized or enlarged, and the family is society in miniature.' The same can be said of politics, with the Arab family as a microcosm of the Arab state as a family writ large [...] The regimes – even the most unpopular ones – are products of the societies they govern and to grasp the nature of the problem we have to start by looking at society's building blocks.
>
> (Whitaker 2009: 48–9)

However, there is something *really* wrong with this line of argument, telling us deceptively little about the 'Arab family' and state it attempts to analyse. By alleging an equation between the Arab family and the Arab state, not only does the author simplify, over-generalise and essentialise both, but he also indirectly denies the complexities and histories of power relations by implying that patriarchy (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990; Hatem 1987) is something essential to the Arab family structure. This also implies, idealistically, that the structures of domination in the Middle East are a 'natural' and inevitable *product* of that essential Arab culture. It presupposes that a *structure* of vertical power (patriarchy) is a *cultural* endemic characteristic of Arab society (at least a simplified generalisation of the immense variance of a so-called culture that occupies great spatial and temporal space), rather than historically, politically, socially and economically situated and intersubjectively performed, produced, reproduced and challenged (see Lindisfarne 2002;

Mitchell 1990). This is a logically flawed argument since neither ‘culture’ nor power constitute entities in themselves nor are they ahistorical, static and apolitical. There is no defensible definition of culture that assumes the a priori existence of unchanging power relations (Lyon 2004, 2005). Even when the concept of ‘culture’ is used rhetorically to stimulate political barricades and to form political strategies, always already it remains a discursive and practical open-ended question (for valid criticisms against the concept of culture in anthropology, see Abu-Lughod 2006). Culture, then, is certainly not inherently oppressive, since things, concepts and practices are constituted continually and through relations external to them, always variant in space and in time. Neither is culture atemporal, and, nor are Arab regimes solely ‘products of the societies they govern’; there exist connections of course, but there are also global connections and recent events only justify this. Ignoring these philosophical understandings as well as the turbulent post-colonial waters that bleed into and make the ‘Middle East’ bleed today is not only academically irresponsible but politically suspicious – to say the least.[14]

But let us return to Anna. Anna comes from a professional family of Alawi background; her parents are doctors, politically they ascribe to the left and are considered open-minded. A year ago Anna had told me that she grew up without learning about religion or sectarian differences, that her parents emphasised the importance of *love* rather than sectarian or other affiliations when it comes to marriage preference. But a year later, her parents’ opinions had changed, it seemed to happen overnight and Anna felt their pressure as a great constraint. Now Anna has finished her degree (attaining some of the highest marks in her department) and has started working. She was in a relationship with a Christian man, and she felt that she could never tell her parents. The solution for Anna is to obtain a scholarship for further study abroad, in Europe, and to build her life there: a double life that is, distance permitting her a life abroad without telling and upsetting her parents about her choices. ‘Being honest here,’ Anna said, ‘wouldn’t help anybody’.

Anna’s story is similar to many stories of young educated women who travel abroad in search of better professional and social opportunities. Manal, 29, a successful lecturer in the University of Damascus, chose to stay in Syria. She lives an hour outside of Damascus, her family is Muslim, and for the past nine years she has been involved in a love

relationship with a musician, the only-son of a Christian family, Khalid. As there are only religious courts endorsing marriage, Manal and Khalid cannot have a civil marriage and, should they want to get married, one of them would have to change their religion. Neither Manal nor Khalid is especially religious (Manal wears the *hijab* and fasts during Ramadan but does so for 'social reasons'), the problem is that neither of their families would approve of such a union. Manal fears the reactions of her family should they find out, reactions that as she notes would entail either her banishment from the family, or more grave retributions against her lover and herself. Running away, she says, would not solve anything, but create more problems, fears and uncertainties. Excluding many of the complexities of Manal's and Khalid's relationship, Manal embraces the impasse that she lives in, noting that she cannot stop loving Khalid, nor can she abandon her family and career. She chooses to stay put, and to remain unmarried (becoming *'ānissa*, a spinster).

Tawfiq also leads a double life of sorts, 'being Druze' (Khuri 2004) and homosexual. However, Tawfiq refuses to compromise any of these two aspects of his life, in a way refusing to abide by simplistic categories that conflict identities with practices: 'I want my special tradition, my special language, my special rituals. I want to be special – I want to be Druze and be different.' Tawfiq is active within gay networks of Damascus through social media and through meetings with other men in central Damascus. He accepts 'being gay', as he calls it, as a part of himself, at the same time he is also in love with one of his female cousins: 'I would tell her [about my sexuality] if we had a relationship or if we got married. And I think that she'd accept it . . . because that's what love is about.' He envisions his being Druze, Arab and gay as not mutually exclusive. Tawfiq notes, 'I think that my mother knows there is something special in me.' Would he ever tell his family openly, should he fall in love with another man? 'No, I cannot even conceive of hurting one hair from my mother's head . . . I would never allow that to happen.' At the same time, Tawfiq likes to spend his salary buying new fashionable clothes, much to the distaste of his father, spend his time in 'gay' chat rooms and in rendezvous, adopting a certain 'pride' that has much in common with the extrovert indications of a globalised 'being gay' discourse (cf. Kirtsoglou 2004: 102–24).

How can we understand Anna's, Manal's and Tawfiq's 'love crimes'? Are these indeed 'crimes'? Can desires constitute discourses and practices

of resistance? And, if they do, what is this resistance, to what or who is it directed, what are its implications, and is it strategically effective?

Foucault suggests studying power relations 'through the antagonism of strategies' by 'using resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations' (Foucault, 1982: 780). Casting a critical eye over the usually 'thick', sophisticated but often inconsequential and/or romanticising studies of resistance,[15] Abu-Lughod suggests treating resistance strategies encountered in the field as a 'diagnostic of power' (1990: 41), searching for the implications of resistance, and enabling us 'to trace how power relations are historically transformed' (1990: 42):

> With the shift in perspective I am advocating, asking not about the status of resistance itself but about what the forms of resistance indicate about the forms of power that they are up against, we are onto new ground. In addition to questions such as whether official ideology is really ever hegemonic or whether cultural or verbal resistance counts as much as other kinds, we can begin to ask what can be learned about power if we take for granted that resistances, of whatever form, *signal sites of struggle*.
>
> (Abu-Lughod 1990: 47, my emphasis)

Anna's and Manal's stories of love can be viewed as resistance practices and discourses: a tactical use of desire against their parents' wishes and authority, and as resistance against social conventions such as the practice of sectarian intermarriage.[16] Simultaneously, resistance against parental authority not only implies but also reconfirms and reinforces the power relations between generations. These power relations between generations, and therefore resistance strategies also, are both economically and socially interdependent since both Anna and Manal[17] rely (and through that relate) on the economic and social capital of their parents (Abu-Lughod 1990: 49; cf. Khalaf 1981; Rugh 1997).[18] Furthermore, the young women's transgression and defiance against the social expectation of sectarian marriage (by immigration out of this milieu and by remaining unmarried) point to the direction of the power of sectarian politics. Of course, 'sectarian politics' is a very problematic term because it is often used to denote a residual of essentialist 'traditional-cultural-original' power structures within a 'modern' time-frame. However, if we were to take a contextualised,

historical, dynamic, political and socio-economic analysis of 'sectarian' politics, we would ask the following question: what roles have 'sectarian' politics played and are playing in the formation of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Syrian state and polity?

The Ba'thist regime in Syria has effectively negotiated a secular state in which sectarian or class-based differences are substituted with regional cultural variation. The state rhetoric of this type of secularism (in which Syrian nationalism corresponds to the Syrian state-of-empire political discourse of local cosmopolitanism) is most visually powerfully propagated through state-sponsored cultural and folklore festivals in which the otherwise viewed as 'sectarian', religious and ethnic difference is celebrated as a *cultural-regional* difference, with the state emerging as its grand patron. Another example of the negotiations between state and subjects on secularism and sectarianism comes from Anna's open-minded, leftist Alawi parents. The apparent contradiction between sectarian affiliation and leftist political inclination is emblematic in the way that the Ba'thist secular rhetoric has successfully and strategically been re-appropriated by Syrian middle classes. By proclaiming one type of difference, that of cultural-regional variation, the state rhetoric actually facilitates the opening of Pandora's box in that the existence of difference is inscribed but what *kind* of difference is negotiable depending on different socio-political and economic contexts. Therefore, although the state openly celebrates secularism through cultural-regional variation, at the same time it provides little in the way of economic and social incentives that could potentially challenge socio-economic networks that are based on sectarian (amongst others, such as class) relationships. Could it, in fact, be the case that the state rhetoric of secularism and cultural variation has actually rigidified sectarian boundaries, breathing new life into these relations by way of its failure to establish social 'welfare' institutions and services? But can't this resurgence also be explained through a critical investigation paradigmatic of a greater 'modernity', of how the hegemonic attempt to 'fix' identities actually contributes to their proliferation?[19]

Taking resistance as a diagnostic of power, it is easy to see the alternative implications and interpretations for the three different 'love crimes'. For example, Anna's solution to her resistance against parental authority and social conformity is to leave Syria, its economic and social

challenges, altogether behind. In this instance, her form of resistance becomes almost congruent to the technologies of the self in a global capitalist system in which the construction of personhood as 'individual' becomes possible through the consumption of a hegemonic discourse that allures to an entity that geographically gratifies itself as 'West', calls itself 'liberal' and 'open-minded' by dividing the world hierarchically and ever-so unequally, dominant and neo-colonial through its economic and 'cultural' monopoly on 'opportunities' – which Anna's resistance strategy inevitably perpetuates. This hegemonic discourse does not simply delineate geography, for example Europe as the 'most attractive optional exile', but structures the concept of freedom within the parameters of possession and property – an ownership of freedom that appears politically and manifests itself as geographically bound, whilst simultaneously it is something to be exported and something that can be found in some place else; in the politics of ownership, this neocolonial discourse of freedom does not perceive it as something to struggle, not a process, and not something that for example, the Syrians can themselves *make*.

Manal's self-inflicted martyrdom, on the other hand, is not a passive adherence to parental and social authorities through the embodiment of the traditional concept of spinster (*'ānissa*), but the situational re-appropriation of this concept in order to maintain her financial independence, her familial networks and her lover, albeit in a precarious balance. Nevertheless, as a diagnostic, this resistance strategy does point out the resilience of the dominant power structures within Syria, resisting but also accommodating them. Both the cases of Anna and Manal, illustrate the complex ways that desires become discourses of resistance, showing the struggles that Syrian youth often face, and the challenges and opportunities they consciously leave untaken in undermining their socio-political milieu.

An accommodation of a different kind takes place in Tawfiq's narratives and practices. Adopting the seemingly fixed categories of being Druze and gay in a way that is both situational and not mutually exclusive, Tawfiq challenges the gendered stereotypes of both local Druze and the 'gay' hegemonic discourses. His is an instance of gender performativity (Butler 1990), an instance not only of:

> alternative sexualities, but primarily about alternative *textualities* – that is, about conflicting readings of existing cultural texts, and

> about the reflexive capacity of the social actor 'to use a particular cultural text to produce a specific orientation towards a given ideology' (Moore 1986: 97) in an inconsistent manner. [. . .] Through contradictory and intertextual performances the subjects [. . .] institute a rift between their own readings and the readings of others, as well as within their own readings [. . .] they resignify performative stereotypes effecting the production of multiple (and conflicting) texts that interact within a seemingly single performance.
>
> (Kirtsoglou 2004: 37)

By performing multiple textualities, Tawfiq challenges the rigidity of those power relations that construct the categories of 'Druze' and 'gay' as separate entities. At the same time, however, these categories are reproduced as separate and strengthened in Tawfiq's practice of closure. However, at the same time that gender emerges as situational and performative, homosexuality or being 'gay' in Tawfiq's parlance and practice points to his resistance against normative forms of authority (such as sectarian/communal identities and obligations) but also, much like in Anna's strategy, to the hegemony of a global discourse which categorises, constructs and 'consumes' sexualities permeating its own exploitative structuring structures.

Of Revolutions and Conclusions or, Sham's Youth and the Life of Politics

> If the step were not being taken, if the stumbling-forward ache were not alive, the bombs would not fall, the throats would not be cut. Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while the bombers live – for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died. And fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live – for every little beaten strike is proof that the step is being taken. And this you can know – fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.
>
> (Steinbeck 2000: 156–7)

So, is the Syrian regime safe from its youth's rage?

Throughout this chapter I have looked at examples of, mainly Damascene, Syrian youth's aspirations, the challenges they face, the inventiveness and multiple forms of resistance they employ. These include the embodiment of politics through performing and thus re-forming identities and histories in Singing Jowlan, the economically inventive and socially ingenious social structure of the *jama'iyya*, and the challenges embedded in love and in resistance that youth faces. Since both the anthropology of Syria and that of Arab youth are scarcely a theme of academic endeavour, I have sketched a nuanced complex picture of what such an enterprise could entail, hopeful that it will inspire further debate and will contribute to future understandings. But this is not the time to play prophets of the future wearing our academic credentials like badges of honour. A year ago, no one, certainly no academic, would have foreseen or imagined history unfolding, tyrants trembling, or international hypocrisy parodied, under the will of Arab people – the unlikely revolutionaries turned into exemplary beasts of democracy, using the most etymological meaning of the word, despite all the years of imperialist propaganda and local suffocation they have suffered. I am an anthropologist not a prophet, and I am sure that whatever happens, Syrians including Syrian youth, will always surprise and impress me.

As a last note, I also wish to relate my findings comparatively to what is going on now in the Middle East, to the revolutionary tide that has swept Tunisia, Egypt, and now Libya, Yemen and Bahrain – tomorrow maybe Jordan. In 'A Veiled Tango' ('Une Tango Voile'), Syrian economist Samir Aita depicted, back in 2008, a vivid political conversation between a company of Damascene youth, noting:

> Syria's young – under-employed and politically frustrated – are hoping for some more immediate, modest change. What they want is to work and live, here or elsewhere, be free to talk about politics, economy and society – and to dance. [. . .] They're quite a sight, these apparently carefree young Syrians dancing. They must have spent hours practising. Girls in jeans and shirts, with a headscarf covering their hair, dance a tango with boys. (They've only started wearing the hijab in the past two years.) Now and

> then the mood is lighter, with a salsa or a rumba. [. . .] Young Syrians don't dream of great political changes, let alone of revolution. Just of being able to talk politics. They just want the DJ to play that tango again so they can dance. Even with their heads covered.
>
> (Aita 2008)

Where yesterday it was thought of as reforming, today, the Syrian regime is often at the bitter end of criticism regarding political freedoms, such as freedom of expression and human rights abuses. Putting aside for a moment the real effects of regime domination (manifested in tortures, imprisonments and brutal killings), the rhetorical parlance regarding 'human rights' and 'freedom of expression' has been colonised and invested with hegemonic meaning throughout the course of the twentieth century in numerous neocolonial projects. As Falk (2011) notes, 'these ideas, to a large extent [were] nurtured in the hothouse of Western consciousness and then innocently exported as a sign of good will, like "nationalism" a century earlier.' But nothing is innocent in international politics and these ideas were co-opted not only to disguise subtler forms of post-colonial domination but also to justify the necessity of capitalist patronage in contexts which freedoms, rights and especially 'democracy' become commodities to be exported and imported based on global market demands. Since the years of the Bush administration, the USA sought a political intervention in Syria by overtly or covertly funding 'democracy promotion', 'election monitoring' and oppositional movements, usually based outside of the country.[20] US plans did not work out. Actually, they had the opposite effect: discrediting certain opposition forces as well as, to some extent, the legitimate demands for change or reform.

At the start of 2011, commentators rushed to say that Syria is unlikely to experience the uprising it did. One of the most frequent causations is that the regime is so oppressive that civil society cannot exist in Syria. Of course in neoliberal parlance this concept myopically translates into NGOs, charitable organisations, human rights groups, and not necessarily political parties, even less, this concept is ethnocentrically blind when it comes to indigenous forms of organisation that occupy the space between state and household. As a concept genealogically related to Enlightenment ideas of rationality and citizenship, state and subject, and

the social institutions that help in negotiating this relationship but without questioning it, the concept of civil society rests on the presumption of the *de facto* relations that constitute state and subject as well as reinforcing the status quo through apolitical, fragmented participation of a mediatory nature. Furthermore, the concept of civil society, in both describing and theorising the practice of good citizenship, is used as both a political *theory* and a political *method* of 'measuring' 'democratic participation'. This is highly problematic because theory and method, being tautological, only serve to reinforce their common assumptions, revealing a circular infallible logic.

Even if we were to consent to some sort of usefulness in the term civil society as defining the broad in-between space between state and household, then it would be very biased, if not indeed Orientalist, to legitimise certain expressions of civil society, such as institutionalised, bureaucratic NGOs, in favour of indigenous forms of social and communal organisations, such as the *jama'iyya*. For social networks are not a phenomenon of a liberal 'West', wherever that might be, but an emergent result of human interaction, something so necessary that it actually creates sociality. It is simply unfounded the belief that civil society is an epiphenomenon of modernity existing only within the realm of liberal capitalism and its greater or lesser patrons and clients (Layton 2006). Power elites, religious authorities, communal committees, cooperatives, unions, and neighbourhood and kinship ties: all these are spaces where individuals come together not only as individuals but as aggregates of social action occupying, connecting, reinforcing or challenging the space between state and individual subjects (see Eickelman and Piscatori 2004). Furthermore, such narratives regarding the 'lack' of civil society in Syria not only underestimate its people, but deny them the mere ability to have and exercise any kind of agency (cf. Sahlins 1999). The ethnographic examples here point in the opposite direction.

The ethnographic examples in this chapter demonstrate that Syrian youth has the agency and the power to challenge, change or reinforce the context of their lives, the contexts of their freedoms and dominations. Is the Syrian state safe from their rage? This is not my answer to give. But what I can say is that neither the state nor the neocolonial global capitalism can ever be safe in front of youth and in front of its rage. The need and the capacity for change exist, in Syria as everywhere else. And change takes place everyday. In the final analysis, only the Syrians can

shape when and how their desires will be manifested. Nevertheless, a cautionary mark is necessary: although the Arab 'youth' should definitely be further explored and debated, this should happen in relation to broader social, political and economic contexts. Furthermore, in terms of revolutions, although in recent contexts the youth may embody narratives of systemic failure, it would be uncritical to presuppose that such narratives are only emblematic of youth.

Finally, irrespective of whatever resistance strategy the youth choose, even irrespective of its results, revolutionary action and thought, much like a person always constituted by its relations, are fundamentally forged by the sweat of labour, but always on the street. As shown, resistance may not always have liberating implications. Nevertheless, no type of resistance and no type of rebellion or revolution is ever futile, irrespectively of what the 'next day' brings.

CHAPTER 7

DANCING MARRIAGE WITH LEISH

A Syrian Dance

In October 2009, the Syrian movement theatre troupe Leish performed *Alf Mabrouk* (Congratulations!) inside the basement of Damascus Citadel in Syria. *Alf Mabrouk* is a site-specific performance, in which the audience actively participates through following the performers into different rooms and spaces. The troupe toured in Syrian cities and in Amsterdam, Holland, for the duration of a year. Leish is the first, amongst very few, movement theatre troupes operating in Syria. Described as a 'rare' (Al-Khodor 2010), breathtaking and a 'must-see' performance (Atassi 2009), a 'rebellious cry in an oppressive society' (Houli 2010), the performance has received far-reaching praise from both within as well as outside of Syria.[1]

The performance explores the complex milieu of multiple, and often contradictory, Syrian and Arab identities in religious ceremonies. Through a performative ritual marriage, it involves performers and audience alike in a contemporary ritual play of engendered subjectivities. The performance locates the ritual nuptial body as a site for contemporary debates. The theme, however, is not marriage itself, but rather what goes on before marriage: the 'taboo' of premarital relations, the problem of exogamous desires and endogamous conventions. *Alf Mabrouk* uses ritual and gendered relations to lay bare the conflict between personal desire and social obligation. The play is a provocative treatise on the acceptance of willing domination by social norms, conventions, even the

'fear of God' – all of which are administered, Leish shows, through the lure and violence of gendered or sectarian intimacy. The performance, therefore, offers a lens through which to trace gender relations, social and sectarian conventions, juxtaposed against the broader historical and political landscape in contemporary Syria.

Why Not?

Leish in Arabic means 'why?', and through experiments with theatre, contemporary dance, historical research on ritual practices, Leish troupe ponders: 'why not?' (*leish la*). Established in 1999 by Noura Murad, its artistic director, the troupe is an interdisciplinary group of artists and intellectuals working within the realm of contemporary movement theatre (Kostrz 2008), who aim to address and challenge theatrical and everyday conventions.

Noura Murad, the founder, artistic director and performer in Leish, comes from a well-known Damascene Muslim family. Her parents were intellectuals: her mother a film-maker, her father a film critic and a journalist. Noura was born in Russia in 1972, where she spent the first eight years of her life, whilst her parents were studying there. She completed her school studies in Damascus and finished the Damascus High Institute of Dramatic Arts. As an actress she has worked in numerous Syrian theatrical plays as well as in television and radio productions. In 1998–9, she studied in France, in the Theatre du Mouvement Company (Kostrz 2008). There, she was influenced by the theatrical method of 'autoportrait'. She returned to Syria at the end of 1999 and taught at the High Institute of Dramatic Arts until 2003.

Licensed through the Artists' Union, Leish is one of the very few independent troupes in Syria, independent in the sense of not being a recipient of public funding or working within the 'conventional producing rules in the Directorate of Theatre and Music' (Ismael 2010). Its work has been supported financially by: the Goethe Institute in Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), The Young Arab Theatre Fund (YATF), The French Cultural Centre in Damascus (CCF) and the French Institute of the Middle East (IFPO). *Alf Mabrouk* was funded by French–German Elysse, Hivos, and Radio Arabesque.

The troupe operates within the remit of a broader intellectual coalition named the 'Identities Project' (2006–16). The aim of the

Identities Project is to [de]construct a vocabulary of Arab movements based on the religious attitudes and practices of the three religions of the Middle East (Islam, Christianity, Judaism) and specifically 'the influence of rituals in the formation of identity. Our approach is interdisciplinary: dancers, actors and musicians collectively study the various rituals in a series of workshops prior to the performance' (interview with Murad, Wagner 2009).

Leish's performances challenge and confront ritual conformity vis-à-vis personal desire, contesting 'ritual order' and by extension social assumptions and expectations, such as gender roles and ideas of community, sectarianism and social normativity. Social conventions are brought to life through a series of tensions; tensions often depicted in the protagonists' plight to confront, or adapt to, socially constructed norms and practices.[2] The troupe has authored a number of performances as well as making national and international appearances, winning the Best Scenography Award in the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (2000). Put differently, the Leish troupe (in the words of Murad) forces the audience,

> to find and see themselves in the details of our work [. . .] They know the funeral, they know the wedding and maybe they expect something and I always, always want to not [be] doing what they expect from me, and to shock them in a way.
>
> (Interview with Murad, 11 September 2009)

Focusing on the ritual of marriage, the body, and contemporary dance, *Congratulations!* is the second performance within the Identities Project. The first, *Once They Die, They'll Realize* (2008), dealt with the theme of fear through the ritual of funeral, whilst a third performance regarding the rituals of childbirth was being prepared, before the start of the ongoing war. Since 2011, Noura Murad is one of the very few Syrian artists that have remained in the country, where she continues to teach in the Damascus High Institute of Dramatic Arts.

Alf Mabrouk: Writing a Performance

To what extent a movement theatre performance may be scripted, de-scripted, described and interpreted is a matter of great many debates

(Cowan 1990; Gell 1998; Layton 1981). To what extent does this ring true for our field notes (Clifford and Marcus 1986; States 1996)? Below, I describe and interpret a performance that I have watched in different stages of its development (ranging from initial rehearsals to the last performance in 2011), and in different settings (inside Syria 2009–10, in Holland during the group's participation in the Jullidance Festival 2010, and in a video recording of the first performance in Damascus Citadel during October 2009). The performance is described on the basis of the six scenes of which it is comprised. These descriptions however, are always already intersected through my gaze and subjective interpretations. Views and interpretations are further influenced by the performance's gender segregation of the audience, and thus my conclusions are based on what I saw as part of the female audience.

Director: Noura Murad
Performers: Ramzik Gabrillian, François Peyer, Fayhaa' Abu Hamed, Noura Murad
Scenography: Bardu Bejan
Scenario: Radwan Taleb
Music: Shadi Ali

Scene I

A female and a male usher divide the audience into two segregated gendered groups and lead their respective gendered groups into a small room. We will remain separated until the very last scene of the performance. Sounds of breathing, of heartbeats permeate the space. One, then two shadows appear on the stage, they become four, and for a second they resemble knives. The shadows belong to four performers that enter the room in parallel same-gendered pairs: each pair is tied together with a white ribbon. All performers wear a long white veil covering their faces – the ribbons and veils signify the bonds of marriage. At first they seem like they are walking marionettes, then dancing, then they remind me of horses galloping, their riders bearing spears or emblems of war. The movements are tense and coordinated, in a way that makes the gendered distinction appear as a mirror image, a reflection. Tension and coordination. Is this a dance? Is it a pantomime? Is it *dabkeh*? Is it something being born or something



Figure 7.1 Scene I: gender-segregated welcome. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.

trying to stay alive? We, the audience, are perplexed. We feel the tension. Are we too close to the performers? The performers take four Damascene wooden inlaid plates filled with sugared almonds (*moulabas*) and align themselves in the middle of the room, where the audience is offered the traditional wedding sweets and then moves to the next room.

Scene II

We are guided into a long, narrow, dark room – the last members of the audience are almost forced in by the performers. The gender segregation of performers and audience is reinforced by a long, white, transparent curtain that divides the room into two halves. The two women performers face the female audience. We can somewhat make out through faint silhouettes that the other side of the curtain is similarly arranged. The two couples initiate what seems like a game, and they begin exploring the person that is tied to them as well as the person standing behind the curtain. The two female performers, almost diagonally arranged, start dancing with *almost* the same moves.

Their steps are not as coordinated as in the previous scene as one of them seems to be lagging behind. Coordination gives way to difference, until the moves are extenuated so much that there is a rupture, a virtual fight between the couple. This rupture, embodied in the tensions of the binding and dividing rope, spills out in an open battle the moment two opposite gender performers attempt to escape their binding ropes, and escape into the unknown space hidden behind the curtain. Let us call these two male and female performers the 'explorers'. The same gendered performers to whom the explorers are bound will be the 'restrictors'. When the two explorers try to see each other, to touch, they attempt to lift their veils, but the rope of their gendered couple ties and holds them back. The curtain becomes a battlefield, or a sea. As they draw closer to each other, the restrictors hold them back, attempting to spatially separate a union that has not even begun. The exploration of the 'other' side, filled with curiosity and desire, becomes a battle, a battle of ribbons which exerts tensions and limits movement.



Figure 7.2 Scene II: exploration and restriction. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.



Figure 7.3 Scene III: solo dance. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.

Scene III

Four white transparent curtains form a box in the middle of the room. The audience is guided inside the box which has rectangular window-like apertures. The segregated audience stands on opposite sides inside the box and looks out of the apertures. We, the women, watch the male restrictor. The men gaze out to the female restrictor. These two performers now begin a solo auto-erotic dance. But it is no dance – they seem overtaken, in no way able to control their bodies and desires. His solo begins slowly, uncertainly. Shy almost, but tense. We suspect what he's doing . . . but can it be true, on stage (I feel like we are peeping from our windows into a 'private' space)? As their moves become tenser, the audience continues, albeit reluctantly, to peep out. The performers finish and retreat.

Scene IV

The audience moves out of the box and into the space where the restrictors were. We come to occupy their space . . . As if the roles have been reversed, as if their 'private' has become our 'public'. Again, it feels

strange to go into the same space that just moments ago . . . It feels . . . shameful, unclean . . . And somehow, voyeuristic. Yet, being outside the curtain box feels, strangely, liberating. We have to peep in through the windows again, but this time maybe it feels more 'normal', maybe because we're looking in rather than out, maybe because we got used to peeping. The explorers enter the box tied together with a long white ribbon. Inside the box, there is an area on the floor bounded by another white rope. The two explorers start a duet dance within the boundaries of this space, occasionally allying the floor boundaries. They begin, slowly and shyly at the start, an oriental dance: characteristic 'oriental' movements of the shoulders and breasts, shimmies and weaves of the torso and the hips. The woman's dance is coy and feminine, sometimes childish, sometimes not so, and the man's follows her lead, dancing with the same innocent desire. Their dance combines innocence with seduction, inhibition with passion. They touch each other, whirl around, and kiss. Their bodies seem less tense now. As the couple dance, the two other performers enter the box. They all start the 'rope game' (*la'ab al-kheyṭ*), a game played by children in the neighbourhoods of Damascus,



Figure 7.4 Scene IV: the rope game and the lovers. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.

a game of infinite convolutions. The explorer-lovers are ensnared within the rope webs, being in and out of them, and moving along to their almost mechanical waves. We move to the next room.

Scene V

This room is very big. There is a familiar curtain cutting it in half. We are moved to the right side of the curtain, the men to the left. Next to the curtain on either side there is a big metallic tray (*ṣaniyya*) on the floor. The tray is filled with white rice. In front of the tray there is a smaller metallic bowl. The setting looks like a *ḥammām* – a public bath. The tray, the rice, the bath – all these things constitute the iconography of marriage.

There, the male and female restrictors await their explorer counterparts whilst thumping a stone against the ground – this is accompanied by the contorting bodies of their partners. The scene is choreographed with the restrictor woman sitting on her knees at the back of the room whilst her explorer pair stays at the front (the same arrangement is visible on the other side). Sudden, powerful thumping is echoed across the room, producing a frightening call. Female and male explorers shake with every hit, as if they feel it as a whip on their bodies. They seem in pain, struggling for air, confused and surrendered to this violent punishment. As their bodies tremble to the sounds of pounding, almost unwillingly they move closer and closer to face the source of the sound. With her final pounding, the restrictor stands up from the floor and moves closer to the explorer, who stands slouched next to her facing the audience. The restrictor pokes, slowly and violently, at the explorer: she is inspecting the body and punishing the transgressor. The restrictor's facial expression has the ruthlessness of someone with the authority to inflict severe torture. And yet, somehow there is an empathy in the restrictor's expression, perhaps in the way she's looking at her suffering partner, as if she's saying 'I told you not to. Now we have to be punished.' There is an implicit eroticism in that most violent instant. The explorer shakes and trembles, submitting to the rite of punishment: her head falls onto the hand of the restrictor, who straightens it up mechanically. The couple face each other and fall, through a mutually accepted and submitted duet, in each other's arms, an attempt to reconnect or to regain their balance. The restrictor leads her partner into

the large metallic plate, and, using the smaller bowl, curling over her, she pours white rice instead of water on the explorer's hair. This feels like an intimate, familiar (almost seductively so) purgatory. Then, the explorer washes herself, in the same slow and painful manner before taking the restrictor's hand and cleansing her face with it. The explorer wipes her hand with a white handkerchief and they both get out of the bath almost in tears. They dance, intensely, coordinated, with their hands inflicting hits on the wall, the floor, and on each other. Their hands cover their mouths; they are in pain. Male and female explorers face the curtain but not each other. The restrictor brings a veil, and carefully dresses her same-gender partner with it, she then wears her own. She brings the ropes and ties one end to her explorer and the other onto herself. The two restrictors open the curtains. The explorers start moving in the same steps as in the first scene, and they tie another ribbon to the extended fists of their same-gender partners. Moving along the swirling step, they form a quadrant with the two explorers in the front, and their restrictors directly behind. In coordination they move on to the next room.



Figure 7.5 Scene V: inside the *ḥammām*. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.



Figure 7.6 Scene VI: the last *dabkeh*. Photograph by Mais Shourgajy, 2009.

Scene VI

The four performers make a large circle that is bounded by the ropes on their wrists, the audience is led inside the circle, for the first and last time in a non-segregated fashion. The music begins with a slow tune played by an *'ūd*. The performers start to move first their shoulders, then to extend their arms, and their legs, then to turn around with extenuated torso movements. Emphasis shifts to the head, legs and feet, and with a bang of the foot against the floor, a *dabkeh* that had been deconstructed starts to re-form. The music runs faster and faster and so do the movements of the performers, who move around the circle, engulfing the audience. The *dabkeh* is coordinated, implementing every part of the body, and at times stifling. Does it represent a vicious circle? The audience now is centre stage. As the music and the dance run faster, movements become less tense. Can the dance be liberating, then? As the performers dance and jump around the audience, almost inconsequentially they drop their ropes, letting the audience inside the circle, and they, just leave . . . Job done.

Choreographing Analysis: A Political Reading of the Performance

In the contexts of Syria's heterogeneous ethnic and religious matrix, *Alf Mabrouk* invites the problematic of ritual embodiment, marriage politics and violence onto the public stage. What follows provides an ethnographically grounded *political reading* of the performance, an analysis that traces the contours of power, as these run through the dance. I argue that nuptial bodies become the embattled territory over which struggles between different powers occur. These struggles are structured along interior and exterior fault lines: interior because they signify personal battles and battles within one's own intimate social surroundings, such as family, sect, community. Exterior fault lines include the presence (or eloquent silence in the performance) of the Syrian state, as the guarantor of cultural harmony and arbitrator of social convention. They also include the European Union and in particular European states that battle over structuring and funding their own imperialistic goals through artistic appropriations of and on Syrian nuptial bodies. In order to disentangle these multiple struggles, the analysis of *Alf Mabrouk* is structured into five processual 'dance steps', which demonstrate how nuptial bodies become constructed through power struggles, and also how those same bodies may become their limits.

Step 1 visits the recurrent motif of the performance: gender. In deconstructing gendered relations as aspects of social geography, Step 2 asks what kinds of subjects – or mannequins – we may discover in the performance. Step 3 asks how these may or may not become the sites of struggle, and explores on the one hand the imprint of the EU's cultural imperialism onto Syrian bodies, whilst on the other hand the nuptial marks left on the body by the state's cultural policies. As those two separate hegemonies are structured on and around nuptial bodies, Step 4 explores the ways that these bodies simultaneously elude both clear classifications as well as absolute forms of domination. Step 5 provides an alternative practice of intimacy in relation to contested nuptial bodies.

Step 1: Gender as Social Geography

Gender structures the performance thematically even before it starts, as the ushers segregate the audience into gender groups, dividing up

couples and mixed companies that have come together to the performance. This creates uneasiness, as people are forced to not only become part of the performance, but to join a group of same-gendered strangers.

> NM: This separation between men and women ... it forces the audience to meet each other after the performance and talk about it ... Last year, for example, (*laughs*) the men audience tried to, like, be in ...
> MK: Sneak into [the performance]?
> NM: Yeah, yeah – because they were very angry, like 'why can't we see what's happening in the other side?' And for me it was great! Because in life they never, never asked this question: *why* are we separated? It's just because it is like this, it's just because it's the religion ... it's the ritual.
>
> (10 September 2009)

If ritual 'order' and ritual practice (Bell 1992; Bloch 1986) appear as the unchanging and unchallengeable pieces of a social or religious 'order', transplanting their structures of gender segregation onto a conventionally non-segregated stage (the theatre) lays open the structural foundations of both ritual and theatre. At the same time, this juxtaposition of familiar but out of context processes induces a strange familiarity, a ritual dislodging: 'it is like saying to the audience: You are spelt in these rituals; you are part of them' (Jamous 2009). This experience aims to confuse and question the grammar of the moral order, and it is not always welcome:

> The males saw their specified performance and the females saw their own. Only the angels roaming in the place and Noura Murad herself could see the whole performance ... In every moment of the performance, we were not able – neither morally nor artistically – to interpret that as a director's viewpoint of a certain sex, because of one reason: we could not watch the other side of the performance!!!
>
> (Mohammad 2009)

In addressing the moral and artistic use of gender segregation imposed upon the audience, Mohammad condemns the spatial separation of the

performance on the grounds of a visual bias that seeks to find the 'whole picture'. This idea, namely that a visual, panopticon-like view, holds some sort of objective truth is in its turn an effect of the visualist bias as well as the commoditisation of vision into a spectacle to be consumed (Debord 2005 [1977]). *Alf Mabrouk* is a site-specific performance that forces the audience to walk between rooms, corridors and curtains, and it also creates an experience through the adaptation of musical wedding elements, the smells of *gar* and *misk*, and the bitter–sweet taste of *moulabas*, all of which tantalise and contribute to a sensual experience of the performance.

Even visually, it was not a 'half' performance, as silhouettes of the other side *could* be seen, and *could* be sensed, through fragmented apertures and transparent curtains, out of which, the constructed gender segregation of the audience at the start of the performance was, step-by-step, deconstructed throughout the play. Let me explain.

The opposite couples engage in an exploratory game, an exploration of both the person that is tied to them as well as the person that stands opposite, on the other side of the stage. The two opposing couples dance through opposite but complementary movements, whilst the explorers attempt to draw closer to discover the performer who lies behind the veil. As they draw closer to each other, the two restrictors hold them back, an attempt to distance and spatially separate a union that has not yet been achieved. The exploration of the 'other' side, initially out of a naive curiosity that draws them to the unknown, unfamiliar and prohibited, becomes a battle, a battle of ribbons which exerts tensions and limits movement. Although the relationship between the two gendered groups is characterised by a desire of mutual exploration, the relation between the same-gender performers is characterised by an intimate restriction. The sign for this restriction is the ribbon which binds the two performers together and embodies the conflict in-between them.

The first two scenes of the performance establish the parameters of the conflict, that are embodied in ropes and tensions that bind the performers. The performers stand as examples or idioms of social positions, subjects of power rather than 'free' subjectivities. Their movements are disembodied but disciplined, their affinities constructed on the basis of gendered groups whose relationship with each other is one

of mystification and exploration of the unknown other side. Despite the obvious gender-divide, the performance questions gender difference, because the movements of both groups develop like mirror images across the transparent curtains. Gender becomes an effect of spatial positioning. The gender divide exists insofar as there is a distance to separate and something to obscure vision.

> NM: The feminine–masculine issue is that everybody wants to be with the other but ... I don't want to say that women are, like, have a worse condition than men – No. Everybody is in the same condition. Everybody has the same pressure: the other side is unknown ...
>
> (10 September 2009)

Gender becomes an aspect of social geography rather than an inherent identity. The use of space in the performance underlines that masculinities and femininities are socially performed. Difference is sought on the basis of *perceived* unknown otherness, which is an idiom of power relationships rather than a fixed and eternal position. We have already encountered the performative aspects of nuptial intimacy in wedding rituals (see Chapter 4). Gender frames the contexts in which contingent power relations take place, and performers' bodies are tactically de-gendered simultaneously with the gendering of the physical space: in a way, 'gender' moves out of the bodies of the dancers and into the ropes and the curtains. This sexualisation of place is a result, rather than the cause of social geography. And this is how the bodies of the performers may be said semantically to *not* be about gender. In the performance, it is the status quo, – the mainstream convention and the preservation of normativity – not gender relations, that exerts power and inflicts violence:

> Congratulations! spotlights woman's suppression against a woman, and man's against man within the frame of rebelling against customs, conventions and social types. There also is a focus on the paradox of single personality of a man or a woman. This rebellion, as Murad clarifies, is not genuine, but is a sort of submission to the society's want of stereotyping man–woman's relationship. This rebellion contains a lot of fear and expectation of

> society's reaction towards the rebellion that eventually gives up to purification, customs and conventions.
>
> (SANA 2010)

The relationship within each couple is one of domination and violence through binding ropes, for instance in Scene II. This domination embodies, at the same time the intimate, familiar and protective as in Scene 5 of the *ḥammām*. Although much has been written regarding gender and gendered relations in the Arab Middle East (Abu-Lughod 2002; Mahmood 2001; Lindisfarne 2002), what the performance is successful in doing is critically engaging with Syrian nuptial ritual practices, (such as 'bringing the bride', or the day of *ḥammām*) from a position within the Syrian culture. This position of the cultural 'insider', allows the performance to probe, and to an extent transform, these familiar practices.

Step 2: Multiple Tensions and Tense Multiplicities

But if the performance is not about gender, then what is it about?

> NM: The first thing that you will see is the shadows of the performers on the ground [. . .] we're looking for an image to have two bodies in one.
>
> (10 September 2009)

The multiplying shadows establish the contexts of the multiple relations that connect the performers as individuals and as a group. We see one, two, then four shadows in Scene I, then duets dancing in Scene II, whilst in Scene III we peep out to a solo dance. In Scene IV we see them all quadrupled and entangled in a web of ropes. In this way, multiple relations are constructed performatively between performers and the 'tight places'[3] in which they move. This underlines both the fluidity of identities and identifications, and the possibilities of becoming (Manning 2007; Deleuze and Guattari 2005 [1987]). The body, as the site *par excellance* of becoming, is constructed through the multiple tense positions and possibilities that it occupies throughout the performance:

> NM: The Arabic body is tense in general. When your mind follows only orders and does not question anything, this is

> reflected on your body [. . .] Religious-social traditions have a lot of power, and you don't question anything [. . .] The body is a corner, a hidden part of us – but the body expresses your feelings. The body cannot lie. [. . .] Tense because you don't know what's happening – as a machine according to your tradition. Not relaxed or free. In all my performances the body is tense.
>
> (13 July 2010)

In the above quote Noura's singular 'Arabic' body is a practical essentialisation (Herzfeld 2005: 26–33). If, however, words such as 'religion' and 'tradition' are taken to mean contingent socio-political practices, then the tension of bodies may be understood more appropriately as being the result of – and at the same time the site of – struggles. Tension is both the result as well as the effect of the body as a site of struggles.

Step 3: The Nuptial Body as Site for and Subject of Struggles

In the previous section we explored the multiple and tense ways that the protagonists' bodies were formed. Too much emphasis on agency and subjectivities, however, is often criticised to be so relativistic that power relations lose their significance and force. In order to address such criticisms we need look at the subject of power, or as Foucault put it, the subject and power (1982). This means considering power/resistance as two sides of the same coin, in which resistance forms a diagnostic of power (Abu-Lughod 1990). In the performance this diagnostic translates into tensions: tensions of the binding and unbinding ropes. But this leads to a relevant question: whose subject? Or, what struggles are Syrian bodies parts of?

In order to provide an answer we must locate, construct and deconstruct the 'Arab body' as the subject of power – rather than a subjectivity – contextualised within the performance. As a site of tensions and struggles, we must trace the different directions that the ropes take. In order to do this, we shall take three side-steps, so as to follow three of the different powers that exert pressures.

Side-Step 3.1: Funding the Dance, Investing in the Body

Leish is not unique in that it receives funding almost exclusively from European resources and cultural exchange programmes: 'there are no Syrian local independent sponsors, only local partners who organise

events (festivals, venues, etc.). Actually, foreign culture centres, like the French, are considered "local" partners, because they are based in Damascus' (Noura Murad, 13 July 2010). The limited economic support from the Syrian government or the absence of local Syrian sponsors is a recurrent difficulty for Syrian dancers and choreographers because this often forces them to either work within the already well-established dance theatre companies, such as Enana and Ornina, or to seek out foreign funding.

Until after the start of Bashar al-Assad's government, the main problem between Syrian dancers and external sponsors was one of foreign policy: the international political isolation of Syria made the investment climate in the arts unfavourable. However, this political and economic climate was changing by the time I started fieldwork. 2008 was the year that Syria's developing friendship with Turkey (Lawson 2009) was cemented through the latter's intermediary role in unofficial negotiations between Syria and Israel, whilst in the same year Syria's political isolation from Europe was broken when President Sarkozy visited Syria, and President al-Assad visited France. In April 2009, for the first time Damascus was part of the 'Platform for Contemporary Dance in the Middle East', a European-funded programme that in association with local partners in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine aims to bring week-long contemporary dance events and workshops from the European dance scene to the Middle East. The Damascus part of the performance was organised through the meticulous efforts of Mais Seifan (personal interview, 16 June 2009), a Syrian German-trained dancer and choreographer. Alongside drafting an EU–Syria Association agreement, and prior to the current war, the EU was 'the most important external funder for culture' (Galeazi 2014: 3; Al Khatib and Yazaji 2010).

External funding, similarly to any funding, does not come free of conditions. Power 'invests' the body (Foucault 2006 [1977]: 353), and public festivals and art performances are funded not only because 'art [must be funded] for art's sake'.[4] The interaction of European states, and the European Union, with their past Levantine colonies through arts, is far more complex and problematic:

> NM: 'Gender' is the only way to get money, to fund performances. In political terms, EU decides the subject and Arab choreographers and dancers talk about it! There are other conditions as well, it asks,

> for example, three different artists to be exchanged, that's how we have Francois in the performance (and it wasn't easy for him to 'embody' an Arab body). We also get technical support, the sound designer. Unfortunately, external funding is the only opportunity to work without the government.
>
> (13 July 2010)

The European Union's cultural policies and cultural exchange programmes help local artists that have no other form of sponsorship, whilst such policies, one might argue, pave the way for the reconciliation of difference between the stereotypes of 'East' and 'West'. As demonstrated through the examination of the Syrian state's cultural policies, there are many reasons that the politics of such 'cultural' programmes should be scrutinised. Following interviews and discussions with Noura Murad, supported by the views and experiences of other Syrian artists, there are two ways in which EU cultural exchanges must be critically questioned. The first has to do with stereotyping 'East' and 'West': although such stereotypes often hinder rather than help cultural dialogue, how can they be dispelled if not through a historical and political understanding of how these came to be? Indeed, such stereotypes may not be the result of cultural misunderstandings, but the effects of structural inequalities within global capitalist relations (Pels 1997; Wallerstein 2004). Second, the dichotomy of East vs West is neither neutral nor cultural but a *political* inequality between the two through the presumed moral superiority of the West (Chakrabarty 2000). So, why does the EU fund the 'arts' in Syria, and particularly, why does it invite funding applications on the specific topic of 'gender'? As an answer, I quote *verbatim* from my conversation with Noura Murad directly after the end of her performance in Women's Festival, Aleppo:

> The festival is supposed to be about Arab Women and the organisers invited mostly European artists and only two Arabs. There are many reasons for this, one is that the European artists usually have external funding so the organisers don't have to pay for them. They put them in four-star hotels and they put us in two star ones. Their standards are completely different. There are artists in Syria and in the Arab world that asked them to invite them and they did not, they choose to use this to advance their

> own personal connections and networks. Yes, I know that the Arabs cannot easily see the Western art because they can't move freely outside the Arab world, but why don't you give local artists the chance to show and develop their art? They come here to lecture us, to teach us about gender. There are too many politics and economics in cultural exchange programs. Many times they bring to meetings an Ambassador to tell us what to do – I always have fights.
>
> (Noura Murad 16 October 2010)

Noura's reply echoes Said:

> The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character.
>
> (Said 1978: 7–8)

To Said's list of Orientalist practices, we should now add those bureaucratic organisations such as so-called civil society institutions (in the neoliberal sense and not in the Gramscian definition), NGO's and developmental agencies, human rights groups and some activists – in short the new formations of imperialistic and hegemonic perpetuation, this time under the guises of universal and humanitarian 'gifts'.[5] Moreover, the constraints that are entailed in obtaining sponsorship from foreign funding are not unique to Leish. In her play *Yasmine's Home*, the director of Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah, Palestine, Iman Aoun, emphasises the problems and unequal relations of foreign funding for arts (Atallah 2011). Although cultural exchange programmes

rhetorically stress 'dialogue' and co-operation, often the inequalities inherent in political and economic relations are far from equal.

In the works of Hardt and Negri (2001), Empire is formulated as the *new* phase of the international and historical tendencies of global capitalism in which traditional bounded territorial sovereignty, as in the 'state', becomes obsolete.[6] This work provides some valuable and timely descriptions of the continuously shifting 'sands' of global capitalism. However, scepticism remains as to whether these 'new' imperial structures may not be as new as to comprise a wholly different phenomenon from that of imperialism. 'Gender', for one, is one of the oldest and most frequently used avenues for the dissemination and structuring of bodies into disciplinary structures of governmentality. In *Colonising Egypt*, Mitchell (1991: 111–12) shows 'gender' or the 'status of women' to be one of the main concerns of the British colonial administrators. The 'status of women' not only creates a visible site for the realisation of a modern liberal subject, an individual, but provides fertile ground for the exporting of a certain 'morality', 'equality' and 'civilisation'. Gender thus, already defined unequally, becomes the site of disciplinary technique (Mitchell 1991). This is how categories such as 'women' and 'gender' become absolute and fixed. It is here that both 'women' and 'gender' become properly objectified as the imports of cultural imperialism, to be invested in mechanical bodies of disciplinary reproduction. The colonial administrations may be gone, but neocolonial structures such as Cultural Centres and policies of 'dialogues' remain in Syria, as elsewhere. These centres and policies not only set the parameters, the themes that local artists must include in their work (turning artistic creation into 'homework') but through their funds attempt to invest into even the most subversive of arts. If the performance of Leish may be said to be challenging the very stereotypes that is was financed to portray, then its transgressive nuptial bodies still, nevertheless, bare the trademark of their funders – the bodies and their transgressions become commodified, carrying the lasting financial mark of that which made the performance, at least economically, possible.

Side-Step 3.2: Our Oriental Selves: Notes on Auto-Orientalism

Although the relationship between the two gendered groups is characterised by a desire of mutual exploration, the relation between the same-gender performers is characterised by an intimate restriction. The

sign of this restriction is the ribbon which ties the two performers together and which performatively describes the conflict in between them. This bond, represents the relationship between the person and society: how an individual, following her or his personal desires, comes into conflict with socially prescribed rules and expectations – this is underlined by the theme of premarital relations, and how such relations are considered inappropriate and shameful (*'ayb*). The ribbon, thus, is indicative of the relationship, intimate but filled with pressures and tensions, between the person and society, between desires, social obligations and rules.

> Each one of us, as Arabic people, we have two personalities: one of them wants to be free, wants to change; but the other [. . .] the other is very, very, very traditional. [. . .] The conflict is in each one of us. Man or woman. We have this like double personality that makes us suffer for real. [. . .] During the performance we're trying to separate this double personality and trying to talk about this conflict, trying to talk about how sometimes I make my own rules, but I'm always not comfortable with these, because I have all the basic religious-social rules in me.
>
> (Noura Murad, 10 September 2009)

Since at the start of the performance we have one shadow of a body and later this shadow separates into two, interconnected bodies, the analysis can be taken one step further: the relationship between personal and public, or individual and society, is a tension that constructs – and is inseparable from – the 'self'. This means that both individual desires and social norms exist first and foremost within the 'self'. The tension of the rope, then, the conflict between the connected performers, is an *internal* struggle.

However, there is a problem in depicting a social phenomenon as an internal individual struggle. This individualistic conception of personhood is Eurocentric and thus misleading of the cultural context. The performance underlines the tensions of a hegemonic, isolated body through the shadow play at the start, and the consummation of dance at the very end. The theatrical setting of the performance within Damascus' citadel, directly related the geography of power relations onto Arab bodies. It opens a space for the debate of Arab modernity (Shannon

2006): can Arabs be individuals and hence modern, or are they bound to the shackles of a tribal communal 'we' that valorises convention and scapegoats individual transgressors?

There is a psychological link between the theme of the performance which is the Oriental wedding, and the denotations of the place which is a long, narrow basement in the ancient citadel of Damascus. The basement/prison summarises the sought meaning: that the collective unconsciousness of Eastern societies (especially Arab ones) is still dwelling in the prison of these inherited rituals that turned into law characterised by force and obligations. This low [sic] of reality is being reproduced all along generations, never letting temptation sneak out of its cage, for the holy body is the source of forbidden desires, so it was inevitable to impose a rigid censorship on such a sensual experience (Jillo 2009).

Hinting at the sexualised segregated spaces, the above quote from the article by Jillo, 'Cultural Taboos in the Basement of Eastern Unconsciousness', published by the widely-circulated state run *Tishreen* newspaper, figuratively describes a view commonly held by many of the journalists that wrote an appraisal of the performance, such as the condemnation of 'backwardness and reactionary ideologies' (Atassi 2009) and 'the faultiness of culture' (Ismael 2010). Setting aside the Jungian reference, these largely intellectual narratives constitute the 'Arab body' not only as a fixed identity/entity in space and time but also en-frame it within the (political) dichotomies of Orientalism (Said 1978): the Oriental vs the Occidental, the Eastern/Arab vs the Western/European, an oppressive heritage and 'culture'[7] vs a 'democratic' modernity. These dichotomies, political as they are since they advance a specific political, economic and social view of the world, are the shared experiential nexus of many post-colonial settings.

Gender as a topic, and art as a method, feature dramatically in the internal debates and politics concerning Syrian 'modernity': its re-appropriations, legitimacy, as well as who can and cannot be ascribed the term. Art, for example music in Syria, concentrates the paradoxes of modernity, tradition and authenticity (see Shannon 2006). In Arab philosophy and liberal thought, Kassab (2010) describes the second half of the twentieth century as expressed through the inward turn of thought, seclusion and pessimism from the philosophical movements within the Arab world. Historians Elisabeth Thompson

(2000) and Keith Watenpaugh (2006) contextualise gender relations in Syria at the turn of the twentieth century, along other social stratifications and power relations such as class, within the period of the 'colonial contract' (Watenpaugh 2006: 280). During the colonial mandate and post-colonial independence, the new socio-economic formations that had arisen in Syria sought to establish themselves economically as much as symbolically within the political milieu of Syria but also, through a metropolitan desire that sought to attain a global presence. Watenpaugh (2006) argues that the emerging Syrian bourgeoisie were not only the result of an economic modernity but in turn sought to be modern in being middle class. This included a change of narrative and a change in praxis. Changing practices included the proclaimed gender equality as a social characteristic of a certain class in Syria, whose symbolism had both a local political resonance as well as partook in a globalised mode of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) in terms of class embodiments and simultaneously the embodiment of neocolonial hegemony (Salamandra 2004).

Thus, when *Alf Mabrouk* establishes gendered relations as an aspect of social geography, it does not only comment upon unchanging traditions and ritual practices, but acts as an example upon which to locate a *moral economy of the Arab body* as the historically constructed site on which a hegemonic neocolonial modernity battles with locally gendered and classed antinomies. This is a battle over the inscription of a gendered Arab body-politic, and at the same time the subordination of Arab middle classes into the paradoxical, itself gendered, frame of the relationship:

> The West's impulse to assert the universality of modernity exists simultaneously with the denial that the non-Westerner – no matter how successfully he or she incorporated into their lives the constituent elements of being modern – could ever be *really* modern. In this case, the multilingual and sartorially correct 'young Arab' is condemned, in perpetuity, to a hyphenated existence somewhere between a 'real' modernity and its exquisite shadow in the East.
>
> (Watenpaugh 2006: 307)

Thus, in gendering social geography, Syrian art critics and journalists, themselves parts of the local intelligentsia (see Salamandra 2004),

become the modern intellectual children of Orientalism (Said 1978), which, through singularising and condemning 'tradition', become carriers of neocolonialism. The classed internal appropriations of neocolonialism as auto-exotisation (Savigliano 1995) and auto-Orientalisation points out the real difficulties in 'provincializing Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000). Noura Murad, whose early works had been particularly criticised for 'importing French culture', replies:

> I have a very, very religious aunt. I don't think that she really likes my work, but she's the only one of my relatives that will call me before or after a performance to ask how I am doing. She's honest. People who hide their desires, or do different things from what they say they do. That is how my work is most relevant to my personal background, the educated, intellectual urban elite. Other people don't have these pretensions.
>
> (Noura Murad 13 July 2010)

Side-Step 3.3: The State-of-Empire

Ritual, marriage, dance: the elements that structure *Alf Mabrouk* are the same through which the Syrian state forges its own cultural politics. In state-sponsored folklore festivals, the bodies of the dancers are not only inscribed with a sanctioned tradition (and thus made singular and rigid, whilst tradition becomes static and politically unthreatening), but they establish a triangle between dancers-audience-state of intimate co-dependence (something like the relationship between same-gendered couples). This is because through such folklore appropriations, the state emerges as the 'facilitator' or 'guardian' of tradition and of marriage, but also as the *precondition of any* marriage. This is a circular logic that serves to reify the state, as explored in Chapter 5.

In *Alf Mabrouk*, direct references to the state are silent. This, however, is an eloquent silence. In a country where most public performances and spectacles make vocal praise to the president and the state (Wedeen 1999), *Alf Mabrouk*'s insistent indifference is a clear political statement: We know that you exist but there is no place for you here, you are as powerful and as ephemeral as any social convention. Therefore, the state in the performance plays no distinctive part not because it is irrelevant, but because it is redundant. We should not underestimate this political position: the 'state' is not represented as a distinct, anthropomorphic

agency – rather as a mythicised abstraction, as an effect of power relations as Foucault and Mitchell put in, in Chapter 5 – the state *is* social normativity and mainstream convention at large.

Step 4: Reproduction of Convention: Limits of Empires and the Return of Intimate Violence

The marriage ritual attests to the sanctioning of social reproduction, and to the reproduction of convention and normativity, through nuptial bodies. This reproduction is illustrated in everyday practice during marriage ceremonies through the idolised bodies of the bride and groom that are extended and enlarged so as to incorporate the social body-politic onto the bodies of the wedding guests (see Chapter 4). The guests in turn, remake the social and political contexts of marriage, shifting the meanings from a union between two people to an intimate realisation of sectarian, classed and ethno-religious sociality. This practice of making socially-extended nuptial bodies has powerful political extensions when it reaches the public stages of folklore festivals organised by the Syrian state (Chapter 5).

Through *Alf Mabrouk*, two more powers come to the forefront in struggling for the possession of Syrian bodies. First, we noted the role of EU and European states' art and cultural exchange funding. Specifically, *Alf Mabrouk* was funded to open the debate on gender because external funding bodies decided – in and by themselves – that local forms of gender relations are problematic: presuming that local perceptions and practices are inevitably 'lagging behind' European ones. Leish's performance manages to contextualise and problematise fixed gender roles by allocating them as aspects of social geography. Yet, the performance cannot wholly escape the contradictions implicit in its funding, nor to shake off its own 'product placement' tag as an advertising product of imperialist economics.

Secondly, we explored the ways that Leish's performance has been received by local audiences as a commentary on the 'backwardness' and 'imprisonment' of the 'Eastern consciousness'. These responses were analysed as forms of internalising an Orientalist narrative. However, when Noura Murad explained that her most religious and traditional aunt is her most supportive relative, it became clear that the problem was not 'tradition' but, as Noura Murad put it 'pretension'. I understand by this statement that Noura Murad referred to the specific concerns regarding

modernity and authenticity of the urban-based traditional elites in Damascus and Aleppo (for example, see Salamandra 2004). In this way, reading the Orientalist responses from Syrian journalists and art critics, reveals this to be the rhetoric of an intellectual and disenfranchised elite – Christa Salamandra's 2004 work is a detailed ethnography of authenticity and its social struggles within the physical and the ideal place of the old city of Damascus. This urban and elite commentary relegates the 'body' into the 'backward' waters of a hegemonic tradition. As we have seen in the case of Zahra's intellectual and progressive parents, such modernist liberal rhetoric against both social and state conventions often falls short when subversive nuptials threaten to touch the bodies of their own sons and daughters – especially the daughters.

The choreography of *Alf Mabrouk* exposes the different forces that struggle over the possession of the nuptial body, such as the forces of society, the state-of-empire, the imperialism of external cultural sponsors, and internal stratifications and divisions. In the dance, the nuptial bodies of the performers become the crossroads of battles, sites of and for struggles. If battles are structured against and on nuptial bodies, could we perhaps speculate who wins? Let us consider the last scene of the performance.

The performance ends dramatically with the dancers ironically celebrating by dancing *dabkeh* a marriage that is not theirs – a marriage that stands as a metaphor for a failed attempt at social change, a failed fulfilment in the realisation of personal potentialities.

This finale can be understood in different ways. The *dabkeh* forms the social, ethnic, political and sectarian constraints to personal desire. It forms a vicious circle to which there is no solution: the audience remains closed-in and tight to its conventions, claustrophobic and disempowered by its own rules and traditions, its pace, rhythm and momentum. As Noura Murad puts it, '[there is a] big prison in ourselves and we don't want to get out. We don't want to change. We are part of society, part of the prison' (10 September 2009). This is the point at which our unintentional hero – remember him from Umm Nidal's anecdote in Chapter 4 – can take the plaudits no more, slips quietly back into the mass of onlookers, and finds solace as another faceless and inconspicuous member of the crowd. And thus, the play ends, hinting that change is an individual struggle and that as long as there is no change on a personal level, there cannot be change on any other level.

However, if the body is both struggling as well as a site for struggles, then it can also subjugate and liberate itself. If a body can be socially and politically inscribed, if it can desire, if it can be purged, and wiped clean to start again, then it can also inevitably dance back, liberating itself from its own constraints, finding its tempo and choosing its own inscription. Tradition, too, can break free of its monopolising authors, and be seen as collective, dynamic and liberating. Like the volume of the *'ūd* that increases along with the movements of the dancers, exposing a peculiar newly-found vitality. As the performers leave the stage dancing, the audience is left wondering where they might have gone to.

In the battle for the possession of nuptial bodies, there is no final winner. The dance can never be captured within a single, however powerful, frame of domination. Marriage metaphors, politics, and nuptial bodies are enmeshed in constant struggles; but how can they both be sites of violence and sites of intimacy?

Let us go back to the *ḥammām*. After pounding stones and bodies, the same-gender couples enter, together, into the large metallic bowl and rinse themselves with white rice. During wedding dinners, a rice and lamb dish, called *mansaf*, is traditionally offered in such metallic trays (*saniyya*). In the performance, the nuptial bodies take the place of the sacrificial lamb as the purged sacrificial offering. The rice is multivocal and connects the images of the sacrificial meal with the white rice thrown to the couple when the groom goes to 'bring' the bride from her natal home to his.

The archetypical sacrifice of love to society resembles the love story between one of Artemis' priestesses, Comito, and a handsome man by the name of Melanippos. Reaching us through the late antiquity philosopher Pausanias, the two young people fell in love but their parents denied them nuptial union. The couple was sacrificed in the name of Artemis because they had used the goddess's temple as their nuptial chamber:

> The external facade of the temple imposes the 'law of men'. The nuptial interior subverts it. But if the interior becomes the exterior, the world is threatened by the adolescent *diable au corps* that then invades it. So the world strikes back and strikes to kill. Sacrifice and hierogamy[8] are two forces that presuppose each other, are superimposed over each other and interlocked. They oppose

> each other, but they also support each other. Each is the aura of the other. The girl who is going to be sacrificed seems to be waiting for her spouse. While the background to erotic pleasure is dark and bloody. Everything that happens is a pendular motion between these two forces. Facing each other, each, in its gaze, reflects the other. Hierogamy tends toward the destruction of the law, whereas sacrifice reconstructs its bloody base. All it takes to upset this equilibrium is a 'successful love'. But history makes sure the equilibrium survives.
>
> (Calasso 1993: 291–2)

Here the affinity of intimacy and violence re-emerges within the contours of the dialectic between holy marriage and sacrifice. Moreover, if in the above passage we were to substitute hierogamy and sacrifice with intimacy and violence, we would describe the scene of the *ḥammām*. What about history though?

The metallic bowl that rinses the performers with rice whilst they stand in the *ṣaniyya* goes by the name *tesht al-ra'abeh*: a small bowl of fear. To fear Allah (*bi-khafou Allah*), as Noura Murad explained to me, was an old Damascene expression to convey decency and morality. The bowl of fear, often engraved with Qur'ānic verses and blessings, is given to newly-weds to drink water from. It signifies the consumption of the fear of God, a reminder to water down passion and desire that may lead to forgetting social and divine obligation and submission.

Just like the fear of God is consumed through this vessel in weddings, in the performance, this bowl reinstates the fear of the *unknown*: the other side of the curtain, the other gender, the fear of unleashing unrestrained and unexplored desire. This instrument is there to exorcise the unsolicited exploration that started, but was never fully materialised. All it takes to reinstate the rules of men and God is that small bowl of fear. To the other side of convenient intimacy, fear, too, is what maintains the status quo: this is what cuts the exploration short, what makes the unlikely explorers return, willingly, to their punishment and their restrictors. In the *ḥammām* scene, the significant act is that of the willing *return* to restriction. In that instance, the known familiarity turns into the refuge provided by a marriage of convenience: the safe lure of the familiar, the strong – shallow charity of convention and protection. The nuptial body is re-formed into a ritual sanctuary, as a protective *endogamous* shell.

But is the nuptial body nothing more than an intimate endogamous shell of fear? This is where the 'small bowl of fear' returns: a fear of an unknown that in times of crises turns into Appadurai's 'dead certainty' (1998), a deadly re-appropriation of difference and intimacy induced by fear, uncertainty, and the known unknown. *Tesht al-ra'abeh*, the small metallic bowl of fear is not only the fear of the unknown, it is a 'fear of the known', a fear borne out of an awareness of the fine line between intimacy and violence; and what is more is itself the historical contingency, the 'moment' or the 'event' (Badiou 2005; Caton 1999), that turns marriage into sacrifice, intimacy into violence. This is where the problem of endogamy emerges again, not as a traditional unchanging practice, but as the process of boundary making and maintaining: the process that sets the friend from the foe, the insider from the stranger (*ajnabi*). The preference for endogamous marriage is not only a practice of sectarian exclusivity practised just by the Druze and other Syrian minorities (see Chapter 4; Rugh 1997: 217; Khuri 2004: 197). The dramatic return to one's *own* restrictor in the performance, locates endogamy as the social nexus of intimate violence.

Step 5: Creative Interpretations, Relational Intimacies and Back to Druze Cosmology

> Hierogamy is the premise of sacrifice, but on the part of the gods. It is that first mixing of the two worlds, divine and human, to which sacrifice attempts to respond, but with a response that is merely human, the response of creatures living in the realm of the irreversible, creatures who cannot assimilate (or expel) without killing. To the erotic invasion of our bodies, we reply with the knife that slashes the throat, the hand that hurls the stone. [. . .] Hierogamy and sacrifice have in common taking possession of a body, by either invading it or eating it. But, as Prometheus would have it, to assimilate a body men had to kill it and eat its dead flesh. In the meantime, the smoke would envelop the gods. And, in reply, the gods would envelop the bodies like a cloud and suck out their juices drenched in eros.
>
> (Calasso 1993: 292–3)

We have already re-appropriated Calasso's passage to the context of *Alf Mabrouk* with an initial substitution between hierogamy/sacrifice and

intimacy/violence. There is one last substitution we need to make. The ancient gods need to give their place to relational modes and to sociality, thus leaving adequate space for both agency as well as historical contingency. This space in the performance is delineated by the hand that picks up the metallic bowl and purifies both the sacrifice and the nuptial, as these converge into a violent intimacy. But can the hand choose a different course?

> [Fieldnote, June 2009] *Summer evening, spent with my Syrian family {*bayt *Abud-Haddad} in the interior garden of our house. Visitors have come, and one of them, Umm Khalid, is an older woman, in her 60s. She's a beautiful, sturdy woman, wears the traditional Druze* fouta, *she's vibrant, funny, extrovert and direct. She asks me where I come from, 'min al-yunān' (from Greece) I reply. Taking me by complete surprise she replies: 'Oh, al-yunān is beautiful! My son has married one from there, and we have visited your country!'*
>
> *Suspecting that I might not have understood correctly, I asked Tariq that evening what Umm Khalid said. He gave me this answer: 'In our community there are some people who accept this {marrying out}. Maybe they are a bit sad, but what can be done, they love the person and must accept that some are born here but are not Druze. It is natural for the soul to return where it belongs.'*

The use of local beliefs in reincarnation in order to explain the otherwise unacceptable marriage between Druze and non-Druze, is an ingenious paradigm that shows that 'beliefs' and 'traditions' are not fixed, but malleable, open to creative interpretation and re-appropriation. Of course, this understanding contrary to an inherent relationship of violent intimacy recasts social and cultural intimacy as the result of sociality. This way it is a subversive paradigm of social conditionality. It is not the specific rules (the prohibition for marrying outside) that make a 'community' or a 'society' but the very fact that for this 'community' and 'society' to exist there must be social relations. Social relations, therefore, are the building blocks, and it is these relations that Umm Khalid maintains through her interpretation. This story presents a picture of 'tradition' as not fixed but always open to people's creative interpretation and re-appropriation within a relational and not absolute frame. And it shows that it is possible to resolve the apparent tensions of

intimacy and violence, nuptial and sacrifice, without recourse to neocolonial enlightened discourses, without breaking vital social bonds, through using local knowledge. This story is, thus, an example of how intimacy may not turn into violence. The apparent irony is that such a dialectical and creative reinterpretation of cosmology in order to maintain the intimate family relationship comes not from an 'educated' middle-class person, but from a working-class 'traditional'[9] old lady.

Intertextual Movements Instead of a Conclusion

'There is no body that exists before it moves,' writes Manning (2007: xvii) and Barucha adds that identity becomes when movement stops,[10] citing examples of torture in which the body is immobilised over long periods of time, as a way of capturing the person, of distilling and fixing on it an unambiguous identity, upon a previously moving body-target. I think of Appadurai's description, 'making persons out of bodies' (1998: 241; also see Feldman 2004) in situations of ethnic or civil conflicts, the intimacy of close friends and relatives turning macabre in an attempt to erase the 'taxonomic hybridity' of symbolic structures (Douglas in Appadurai 1998: 231) and of intimate everyday relations whose daily fluidity abruptly changes during times of crises. It reminds me of Zahra, her mother's narrative of her daughter as either the victim of deceit or the deceitful.

And then, I see them both, Zahra and her mother, in Leish's performance, dancing together, tied with ropes, ropes of bonds, entanglements of love, intimate and restrictive, full of tensions, pretensions, fear and pain. The mother is the restrictor, the solo dancer, and the one who thumps the stone. Zahra is the restricted, the explorative, the childish and the vulgar. Both are punished: I see them in the *ḥammām*, and in that scene I cannot tell who is who anymore – 'two antonyms of a single woman' (Snaij 2009). I cannot imagine the *dabkeh* scene, though, and I feel guilty. I must say that I talked of this performance many times to them both, and I must confess that I persuaded Zahra's mother to go and watch it. A month later she would find out Zahra's secret. I knew Zahra's secret, I knew her mother's nightmares, and I knew that mothers' nightmares often turn true. I cannot say with certainty what I wanted to achieve . . . Did I want to just have my 'informant's' reception of the performance, a curious

anthropological triangulation? Were my ultimate motives benign? Did I want to foreshadow something to her? Did I have the right to do so? Did I have the right to not do anything? Like an idiot, I asked if she liked the performance. 'It was nice,' she said.

The final scene changes in my mind. Zahra and her mother are still in the *ḥammām* but around them there are people – lots of people. I am not sure if they are dancing, but they move, run, shout. Zahra's story is penetrated by flashing lights, by Al-Jazeera television screens of breaking news and live correspondents. A bloodbath, they say, and I know not whose blood it is or why: is it Zahra's, her mother's, martyrs of either side? Bathing in blood, mother and daughter, amongst other blood stained bodies.

'I don't have any answers to give,' said Noura Murad. In the analysis of the performance the marginal stories of love and art form the basis of an excursion into the limits of power and resistance, as metaphors of power and as practical tensions played on and through intimate and violent bodies. The sequence of our analysis moves in (dance) steps: from subjects to subjects of power, subjects of Empires, and at the same time to the limits of Empires. These subjects dance on the limits of power, they are bodies that play with, resist and reinforce their classifications, and as in the performance where bodies in motion defy a straightforward identity, they continue to move and to dance. Endogamy is a form of exclusivity that administers intimacy and violence, of bringing not the bride but our own back from the threat of strangers (*ajanib*) and other unknowns. The bodies continue to move, to dance, on the limits of the monarchs that attempt to possess them, as between the approximate limits of intimacy and violence.

CHAPTER 8

THE INTIMATE AND VIOLENT STRUGGLES AHEAD

From Weddings to Funerals

'Khalid's wedding is cancelled. There are no weddings nowadays,' said Zahra's mother during a phone conversation in June 2011. The spring and summer months are the preferred marriage time in Syria, they almost form a 'wedding season', throughout which the evening's silence is intersected by the music of wedding parties. But since March 2011, marriages have turned into funerals. When young unmarried people die or are killed, it is traditional to dress the youth's body in bridal clothes and for the funeral procession to sing wedding instead of mourning songs (Hood 2007). When people are killed unjustly, they become martyrs (Bennacer 2008). And turning a martyr's wedding into a funeral is a political choice:

When a Palestinian comrade and a *shahīd* (martyr) sacrifices for his country, he writes a letter to his mother beforehand on whether he wants his funeral to be *mouẓahara* (demonstration) or *'urs* (wedding). A friend of Rashid's died in such a way some years ago and he wrote to his mother that he wants a demonstration. Up to this day when Rashid visits his friend's mother she says to him 'we did not even make him a wedding,' *ya ḥarām* ... (Talal, 24 October 2010).

This conversation took place in Talal's one-room flat in the Old City, ten of us cramped inside a small room with Mohammad's violin, plenty of *'araq*, beers and mouldy cheese – a speciality from Homs – revolutionary songs and the music of Umm Kalthoum. Our young company, ages

ranging from 23 to 27, was composed mostly of Damascus University students, some of them involved with the leftist movement of Kassioun.[1] They were Christians, Alawis and Druzes. Mohammad's Christian family, communists from Homs, had given him a Muslim name – a practice common in communist or leftist families that aimed to break down religious barriers, to signify the peaceful coexistence of Islam, as cultural heritage, along with progressive secularism. Our night was filled with the sweet air of the *nargileh* (water pipe), music, dance and heated political conversations regarding the 'global north and south', Palestine, and political student movements. Little could we have suspected of what the future held. Five months after my last fieldwork visit and that conversation, unrest in the Syrian countryside erupted leading to a bloody war, that, by UN estimates, had cost more than 220,000 lives by April 2015, and had created a humanitarian disaster. Some from the friends of that night, were arrested, some fled, all have lost relatives and friends. Were there signs foreshadowing the coming war, and if yes, why couldn't we see them? What is going on inside Syria today? What, if anything, can we make of tomorrow? Can understandings of power relations, of sect and state, help us decipher what is going on – on the ground? Can poetics be turned into politics, or put differently, what is so powerful about marriage rituals and nuptial bodies that can turn a funeral into a wedding and a wedding into a protest? And can a wedding drum or *dabkeh* ever beat the gun?

Traces and the Continuum of Intimacy and Violence in War and Peace

There is a strand of theoretically rigorous and ethnographically rich work that calls for questions of violence and social suffering to be addressed in all the multiple, contradictory and non-linear ways that these emerge (Das *et al.* 2000; Kleinman *et al.* 1997; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). This strand of theory, proposes a nuanced way of seeing violent episodes as not only absolute or unique events that abruptly erupt and then disappear, but rather as the traces of power relations and violence on a continuum of everyday practice. In this way, structural power and violence (Farmer 2004: 287–8) – the economic, social, and political marginalisation that manifests through this infrastructure – interconnects with symbolic (Bourdieu 2004: 339–40) and everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 2004: 176–9) through which power relations and dominant hierarchies are naturalised and embodied;

expressions of which are gendered and sectarian relations, as well as the varied forms of endogamy we have thus far encountered (in Chapters 4, 5 and 7) – the 'unspeakable crime of intermarriage' (Wacquant 2004: 320). In this respect, it appears that the State is more fruitfully envisaged outside the Weberian framework as holding the monopoly to violence, and instead as the expression and reification of power relations operative subtly within the rubric of everyday life, at the junction between local and global forms of governmentality (Chapters 1 and 5). The 'stage of siege' (Benjamin 1969 in Taussig 2004) that the Syrian State had manipulated in the form of emergency laws, political rhetoric, and in the function of the ongoing stream of outside threats, partly reflects the limitations of the regime's exercise of power, since a violent show of force underlines the limits of power: a power that is actually more pervasive when its explicit exercise is rendered redundant (Arendt 1970: 41–56; Foucault 1991a [1977]). The state's military response to the initial peaceful protests in Syria with a disproportionate show of violence, brutal killings and arbitrary arrests underlined the precariousness of its position, but also the continuation of routinised terror, albeit in a more dramatic manner, that perpetuated and evolved multilaterally in its 40 years of rule. More disconcerting, however, is the Syrian regime's ability to inflict pain, to kill, to arrest and to make disappear, even when such practices go obviously well beyond the legal rendering of *crimen exceptum*.

As Scheper-Hughes (2004: 179) notes regarding the military dictatorship of Brazil, 'the military is not an educational, charitable, or social welfare institution; violence is intrinsic to its nature and logic'. What is disconcerting, is the extension of the grey zone (Levi 2004) as a space of uncertainty, fear, desire and convention (like in *Alf Mabrouk!*); the war in Syria has extended this uncertain and dangerous zone not only between the state and its subjects, but also between and within communities, sects and families: intimacy, once again, turns to violence, Harmony, yet again cries over the lacerated bodies of her children.

For, it is not only the military machine of a state gone berserk that spreads violence. As a site of and for struggle in periods of crises, embodied ambiguities regarding political, ethnic or religious affiliations become forcefully inscribed on to bodies, making intimate and/or making them *other*: 'through violence, bodies of individual persons become metamorphosed into *specimens* of the ethnic category for which they are supposed to stand' (Malkki 2004: 132, emphasis in the

original). Malkki shows how, during the Rwandan civil war and genocide, body maps delineating perceived ethnic difference were used in order to rule out uncertainties or ambiguities between Hutu and Tutsi. Appadurai (1998, 2006) explains the poetics of such macabre taxonomies as an attempt to exorcise intimacy: a final act to verify, classify and deal with the ultimate traitor, the enemy within.

In a similar fashion, albeit less fatal, Zahra's mother argues that her daughter occupies an uncertain intimacy as either a victim of deceit or as a deceitful 'outsider' (Chapter 4). The President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad also blamed the prolonged and violent uprising on uncertain intimacies: Syria has fallen victim to external conspiracies, whilst internal dissidents are branded as deceitful outsiders. Can the violence and communal ostracisation directed against Zahra by her own mother not principally be related to the broad scale terrorism of a state that is often portrayed as the patriarch? Could the response of Zahra's mother not be the silent sign through which endogamy breeds intimacy and violence in both peace and war? Throughout this work I argue that the idiom of marriage, a mode of relating within contingent historical and political contexts, is not only an insightful way to understand local perspectives and practices and power relations, but provides a grounded backdrop for understanding how bodies become both intimate and violent.

Through detailed ethnographic descriptions and anthropological analysis, this work has contributed a way of tracing the subtle but nevertheless violent ways that the Syrian state – but not only the state – attempts to intersect nuptial bodies, and to construct itself as a reified empire. This empirically grounded analysis of the Syrian state as a state-of-empire, not only questions the theoretical validity of nation state as a paradigm for the Middle East, but contradicts most other work that casts the Syrian state as exercising power purely through coercion. As the recent bloodshed in Syria shows, it is not only the coercion but also the breakdown and failure of the state's intimate consent mechanisms that have ruptured and bred violence. Or as Arendt puts it: 'Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power' (Arendt 1970: 53).

This is not to say that the Ba'thist regime had no legitimacy whatsoever – indeed before the conflict erupted Bashar al-Assad was one of the most popular Arab leaders hailed by Western governments as a

reformer. The analysis of structural violence in pre-war Syria does not causally mean that the current war was fuelled by internal grievances and politics alone. Although it is outside the scope of this ethnographic work, we cannot afford to underestimate the role that geopolitics, resources, regional powers and international alliances have played in turning the country into a proxy battlefield (Gerges 2013). Yet, it is truly tragic that in this brutal war, President Bashar al-Assad's threat 'it is us or it is chaos' has turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, the ideology of cultural harmony, and of the Ba'thist State as its guarantor, has been largely successful, and four years of devastating war have managed to diminish the regime's legitimacy but not its coherence: the authoritarian Ba'thist State presents itself as the only stage on which a fictitious and undemocratic 'cultural harmony' may be achieved. The oppositions – whether secular, moderate or Islamist – have yet to produce a vision of 'harmony' that would resolve the injustices of the current system, without sacrificing national unity and sovereignty.

Justice vs Harmony: War, Sectarianism and the Myth of Endogamy

[31 July 2009] *I was impressed by the First Mountain Festival that took place in the city of Suwayda, the capital city of the mainly Druze prefecture of the same name in Jabal al-'Arab. Unlike other festivals, it was organised more as an entrepreneurial exhibition or a bazaar in which one could buy anything from tourist souvenirs and clothes to cars. It will last for a month. With our friends from Jaramana and Karem's cousins from Suwayda we attended a folklore performance by the local group Kanaatha (whom I had met in Idleb). The troupe always has very engaging and energetic acts, this combined with live music and the location made both performers and audience enjoy themselves and pulled audiences off their seats into dancing and singing. During the intermittent breaks, the audience, largely made of youth, would divide into two groups, one on the right and the other on the left side of the amphitheatre, and shout political slogans in response to each other. For example, the right side would with one voice chant:* 'Souriyya, allah, Bashār wa bas' *(Syria, God, Bashar and nothing else) and the left side would reply 'bil roūḥ, bil dam, nafdīk ya Bashār' (with our soul and our blood, we sacrifice for you Bashar). Karem explained that this was a little bit 'silly' and that the groups were using the traditional genre of* jaffa*,*

a kind of singing in response (see Hood 2007), appropriated with the state-sanctioned public slogans.

Two years later, in 2011, and the same slogans were re-appropriated within the contexts of the first Syrian protests, in places other than folklore festivals, in places of amateur-shot YouTube uploads of popular demonstrations throughout Syria. There, '*Souriyya, allah, Bashār wa bas*' became '*Souriyya, allah, ḥurriyyeh wa bas*' (Syria, God, freedom and nothing else), and '*bil roūḥ, bil dam, nafdīk ya Bashār*' became '*bil roūḥ, bil dam, nafdik ya balad*' (with our souls, our blood we sacrifice for you our country). Could folklore festivals, instead of unilaterally inscribing audience's bodies with the prescribed embodiments of the state-of-empire, actually open up spaces of enactment and performance in which the audience is not only able to realise the manufactured rhetoric of the state, but also to realise their distance and difference from the state? And could the social poetics of public performance, such as clapping after the president's name in funerals (Chapter 3) or shouting pro-regime slogans actually have helped constitute new creative and subversive spaces out of repetitive and mundane public habits?

In her book *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, Navaro-Yashin argues that both secularism and Islamism are two of the faces of the state, two ways through which statist public culture evades critique, and through which 'the state' escapes deconstruction, and becomes reified (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 4). That is how Navaro-Yashin explains the apparent 'paradoxes' of Turkish public life: the acute critique of the news, mundane cynicism, and the religiosity of Atatürk's cult.[2] I found the 'fantasy' or the ghost of the state to be recurrent even in critiques of the state in Syria: in leftist and in Islamist critiques of the dictatorship, in the discourse of secularism and civil society discussed many a times with Zahra's parents. I locate this recurrent fantasy expressed through nuptial intimacy: the structuring effect of marriage as an index of a politically exclusive belonging – a social, political and contemporary form of endogamy. Yet, there are also important differences between Atatürk's cult and the cult, as is often characterised, of the Assad (father and son) regime. In the case of Turkey, 'the Turkish state materializes in people's (semi-)consciousness in the figure of the person (man) of Ataturk' and thus 'fetishizing the statue is also an expression of loyalty to the project of the Turkish state' (Navaro-Yashin

2002: 198). It would be hard to argue that the proliferation of posters, badges and statues of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad serve as fetishised idols for the public expression of loyalty through them to the state project in Syria (Wedeen 1999). However, contrary to Wedeen's (1999: 84, 147–8) contention that obedience ('acting as if') rather than loyalty is vital to Assad's cult, I have presented a different argument here: that the Syrian state is more than its president.

As an alternative from the homogenising and ethnocentric readings of the 'nation state' or of 'failed states', in the Syrian state-of-empire, the 'state' is not a synonym to Assad, and justice is neither an attribute of Assad nor of the state. The state emerges as something different: the guarantor of difference, social coexistence, political harmony: the occasional, or frequent, injustice is excused if peace and internal harmony is maintained. This is why the Syrian state still affords some ideological coherence within the Syrian polity, even despite its loss of legitimacy and justice. Indeed, as long as the opposition forces remain fragmented, not only militarily between their different sponsors, also ideologically, the authoritarian state will remain. As long as opposition forces do not address the state's enduring and authoritarian rendition of 'multiculturalism', they will overthrow neither 'the state' nor the Syrian polity. International fantasies and prescriptions to partition Syria along ethnic and sectarian lines (Landis and Zakaria 2014) will not work, on account of three main reasons. First, historical experience of partitions provides grave evidence of increased violence and suffering in the short and longer term (Appadurai 2006). Secondly, the competition over geopolitics between regional and international players that have transformed Syria into a proxy battlefield (al-Masri 2015) is unlikely to yield, at least in the near future, an acceptable partition plan. Thirdly, because the state in Syria is a state-of-empire, it is the 'stage' upon which the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of difference takes place, and so any act that goes against such a unified state would be considered treason of national sovereignty. Indeed, this is a good example demonstrating the fierce belief in national unity and sovereignty expressed since the start of the uprising.

In social practices, it is endogamy that reinforces people's belief in the myth of sectarianism. Sectarianism is not an expression of praetorian or 'natural' identities. It is the historically specific practice and discourse of political belonging, as such it emerged for the first time in the late

nineteenth century under the conditions of Ottoman reform, European imperialism and peasant revolt. Yet, its contemporary renditions, implications and role are political. Academics cannot afford not to ask what purpose lies in regurgitating ideologies of sectarianism, in their new–old garments, and how they are manipulated in this time of war. For sectarianism is a modern effect of the political manipulation of social identities. It predated the war in state discourses. Disharmony is the inevitable outcome of cultural efforts to manufacture harmony; it is the self-fulfilling prophecy. It helps us to understand why the war is so violent and pervasive in this country that was believed to be quite liberal, secular and untroubled. The fragmented nature of the opposition in Syria demonstrates that the state's myth of cultural harmony continues to define its relationship with its citizens in times of war, as well as times of peace. Worse, it is the same myth along with the myth of sectarianism that underscores the horror and brutality meted out by Islamic State in Syria today. From the manufacture of sectarianism to the 'innocent' funding of dance performances, the seeds of the war in Syria today, and the intimate and violent nature of the war, can be traced.

This book comes at a time of war and devastation in Syria. This is a time in which crucial details of what is going on inside Syria are missing, a time when violence escalates on the ground, a time of pornographic and desensitising news media reportages. This, then, is precisely the time for anthropologists to provide thick descriptions, situated and sensitive ethnographies, and to engage with both rigour but also with our unique understanding of local contexts embedded within wider considerations of political economy, international relations and power. For Syria, this is a period in which mystification becomes cultural and political policy. Militantly, anthropologists should bear their arms in critically deconstructing the beasts of 'sectarianism', 'fundamentalism' and 'terrorism'. It is in this way that anthropologists may contribute to the laborious task of parrhesia, the only way to bear the responsibility to our informants.

NOTES

Chapter 1 Introduction

1. Syria is understudied in anthropology with but a few ethnographies available (i.e. Antoun and Quataert 1991; Khalaf 1981; Lindisfarne 2000, Rabo 1986, 2005; Salamandra 2004, Shannon 2006, Silverstein 2012, Wedeen 1999).
2. Ethnographies and ethnomusicological studies among the Syrian Druze community are limited indeed, and include the following: Bennett 1999, and Hood 2002, 2007.
3. Foucault defines 'governmentality' in the following ways:

    1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
    2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs*.
    3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalised'.

    (Foucualt 2005: 142)

4. For an account of a day in the life of a household in Jaramana, and of the resident anthropologist there, see Kastrinou Theodoropoulou, 'The theatre of the not-so-obscure: Cooking as unfolding.' *ELiSS*, 3(1), 2010: 18–23.

5. Some examples of the critical debates regarding Said's Orientalism include: Carrier (1992); Fox (2002); Richardson (1990); and Thomas (1991).
6. Defining hegemony has been debated in anthropology (see Kurtz 1996; Smith 2004; Trouillot 2001). Gramsci defines hegemony as 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Gramsci in Kurtz 1996: 103), and Smith notes that 'hegemony is about the mastering of history' (2004: 217). I employ the concept of hegemony, following Gramsci, Kurtz and Smith, to underline the ways by which consent plays a role in both maintaining as well as potentially subverting the status quo. The Gramscian notion of consent that I employ as above differs from the ways Kant, amongst others, employ the term (see Harvey 2009).
7. The idiomatic use of kinship took different forms, some people would trace a literal bloodline between ancient Greeks and the Druze, others would stress the spiritual affinity as a metaphorical kinship. Additionally, consider the following passages from Joumblatt:

   > We trace our line back to Hermes Trimegistes [...] Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato are widely read in our little country [...] it is a kind of tiny humanist Greece, an *agora* [...] The Druses [sic] are truly rational: they have that "Greek commonsense".
   >
   > (Joumblatt 1982: 32, 37)

Chapter 2 Sect and House

1. For a portrait of Umm Samir, see Kastrinou Theodoropoulou 2010.
2. Population statistics and other demographic indicators are estimations and vary due to the recent influx of Iraqi refugees, most of whom are not officially registered. The Central Bureau of Statistics of the Syrian Arab Republic estimated 114,363 inhabitants in Jaramana in 2006 (Central Bureau of Statistics, SAR, 2009). Informal population estimates put the number as high as 400,000.
3. The Druze population is estimated to be a million worldwide, of which 420,000 are in Syria, 390,000 in Lebanon, 75,000 in Palestine, 15,000 in Jordan and 80,000 outside the Middle East (Makarem 2007). In Syria, the majority of the Druze population resides in the municipality of Suwayda in Jabal al-'Arab.
4. Fears, and realities, of prohibited interfaith love and marriage are not atypical either within the Druze community, or in Syria. I have explored similar stories, their political background and implications in Kastrinou Theodoropoulou 2012. For a similar story, also see Shaaban 1988.

Chapter 3 Birth, Death and Reincarnation

1. 'Other fanciful, but unfounded, theories link them [the Druze] to the French Crusader chief, the Compte de Droix, or derive their name from the word '*durz*', meaning 'cleaver' or 'industrious', or from '*turs*', meaning 'shield', or trace them

to Bani Dariza, a tribe that lived in the vicinity of Mecca at the dawn of Islam. None of these derivations is compatible with the cultural pattern of coining names for sects in Arab society. The pattern is to call a sect by the name of the person thought to be the founder – often to the displeasure of adherents who like to be known by their dogma or some aspect of it. Calling sects by names that they do not like reflects the negative attitude of the dominant Sunni community, which has always seen in the rise of sects, attempts to divide the unity of Islamic *umma*.' (Khuri 2004: 5)

2. On the legacy of Sacy as the father of Orientalism, see Said (1978: 123–30); for Sacy's work on the Druze Epistles, see Naufal (2005: 9–28).
3. An example of the political rewriting of Druze and Lebanese history is Kamal Joumblatt's *I Speak for Lebanon* (1982). For a compelling and detailed analysis of the Druze political historiography in contemporary Lebanon, see Hazran's 'Between Authenticity and Alienation: The Druzes and Lebanon's History' (2009), also see revisionist Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi (2006). For the different social and political contexts that Druze communities exist in, see Betts (1988: xii–xiii).
4. There are two fascinating anthropological studies of Druze communities: Sweet conducted extended fieldwork research in a Lebanese Druze village in the 1960s (1967, 1974), and Khuri carried out a comparative short-term ethnographic project of Druze communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (2004). Other related studies include the sociological study of Lebanese Druze kinship structures by Alamuddin and Starr (1980), and the ethnomusicological study of Hood (2007), Oppenheimer (1980), and Bennett (1999, 2006). For other works regarding the Druze, see the following annotated bibliographies: Fandi and Abu-Shakra (2001), and Gulick (1968: 195, 196, 202, 219).
5. For a history of the development of the three Islamic traditions, see Firro (1992: 4–5).
6. For a detailed history and description of Isma'ili doctrine, see Abu-Izzeddin (1984: 87–101).
7. Alternatively, these stages are also referred as *tanzīl*, *t'awīl* and *tawḥīd* or *islam*, *iman* and *ihsan*, see Makarem (2006: 2).
8. 'Islam (*ẓahir*) is the door to *iman* (*baṭin*), and *iman* is the door to the ultimate goal (*tawḥīd*), the highest stage of religion' (Epistle 9 cited in Firro 1992: 12).
9. 'God is Existence as such, and accordingly He is the only Existent; nothing outside Him exists. He is the Whole. No limitation can be attributed to Him. He is unlimited. [...] Existing things are expressions of God's Unity, they are not parts that constitute a whole; because if one of those existing things ceased to exist, the divine Unity, the One, does not diminish' (Makarem 1979 [1974]: 41–2).
10. For a juxtaposition of the similarities and differences between Islam and Druze religion, and the argument that *tawḥīd* comprises a whole different religion, see Betts (1988: 17–18).
11. See Alamuddin and Starr (1980) and Layish (1982) for contemporary law and practices of Druze communities in Lebanon and Israel.

12. Consider the following passage from the Lebanese Druze leader and founder of the Progressive Socialist Party, Kamal Joumblatt:

> Our dogma is based on initiation; only initiates know how to read and understand the holy books that we call the Books of Wisdom. It is an extension of the Greek and Egyptian hermetic schools – the esoteric traditions – which have passed into Muslim Sufism. At present only a Druse [sic] who has known the 'message' in a previous life can be initiated, if he is worthy.
>
> (Joumblatt 1982: 33)

13. *Tawḥīd* is translated as 'unity in being', and it is derivative of Arabic verb root w-h-d, to be one (Betts 1988: 15). The descriptive noun for the follower of the *tawḥīd* is *muwaḥid* (sing., *muwaḥiddun* pl.), while the name Druze was somewhat derogatively bestowed upon them by the Sunni majority (see Khuri 2004). *Tawḥīd* is also translated as Unitarianism or Monism.
14. Druze reincarnation takes place from human to human only, and the Arabic word used by Druze is *taqamus*. Other groups, such as the Alawis, believe that reincarnation may take place between human and any other living form, this is called *tanashoukh* and it is very different from Druze cosmological beliefs. Some authors wrongly translate *tanashoukh* as the Druze belief in reincarnation.
15. The clearest example of this argument is the cosmogonic emergence of *Nafs* as a result of *'Aql*'s activity.
16. Candles are symbolically lit during the wedding ritual phase of claiming the bride on the threshold of the bride's father's house, see Chapter 4.
17. Jaramana has two recently built mosques that are on the outskirts of the suburb, not audible in the central Druze-concentrated areas, to accommodate the influx of Muslim Iraqi refugees.
18. Abu George is a pseudonym of the Christian-sounding nickname of the original person.
19. Similarly to Islamic norm, *'ayb* refers to things socially forbidden, whereas *ḥarām* to things forbidden by God and thus carries serious implications.
20. For a critical review of the differences between 'ritual' and 'ceremonial', see Bell (1992: 70).
21. I was given this information months later by a member of his extended family.
22. 'After a week, the family of the deceased holds a special ceremony in memory of the dead called *al-'usbu'* (the seventh day), during which they share a 'sacrificial meal'; this brings a formal end to the funeral ritual' (Khuri 2004: 230).
23. See Sweet 1974.
24. During a follow-up research trip in October 2010, funded by Folklore Society.
25. '*Qabīla*' means tribe, '*nisayyah*' is women's, and ''*arabiyyeh*' means Arab's.
26. The regulation, control, management but also the construction and objectification of 'population' through biopolitics as part of forms of power/knowledge is a well-known Foucauldian position. For strategies of politicised reproduction and nationalised maternity in the contexts of Palestinian-Israeli

citizens, see the excellent comprehensive study of Kanaaneh 2002; for the multi-fold narratives and strategies of Palestinian women in Israeli maternity hospitals, see Kisch 2009: 745; for a detailed analysis on the medicalisation of childbirth with specific emphasis on Ceasarian Sections and other medical and contested practices within the context of the Thai internal colonisation of the Muslim minority, see Merli 2008: 61–93.

27. When a birth takes place at home, the pregnant woman is assisted only by other women; this is true for both the Druze community in Jaramana as well as for Syrian Muslim communities. The husband or other male relatives present are not allowed in the ward during childbirth.
28. This proverb, as well as many of the associated customs and beliefs regarding the *arba'īn*, are not particular to the Druze community but practised throughout the Middle East (see Abu-Lughod 1986; Kisch 2009: 734; Granqvist 1947). However, descriptions and explanations in this section are based on fieldwork with the Druze community in Jaramana.
29. For a thought-provoking discussion on the dialectics of binary oppositions in Islamic ideology and practice, see Anderson 1985: 205–9.
30. This tea is highly diuretic and aids in fluid elimination; it is also used during painful menstruation.
31. Also, see Karayanni 2010 [2004]: 29–32, for other uses of *kohl* in the cycle of 'becomings' (31) and an impressive post-modernist analysis of such practices within a post-colonial framework.

Chapter 4 Marriage and Politics in Jaramana

1. For an excellent ethnographic account of processes and transactions during engagement and marriage in a different corner of the Middle East, see Mundy 1995.
2. I have not found evidence of this practice outside of Jaramana or among younger generations in Jaramana.
3. Damascene engagement celebrations are gender segregated.
4. For socio-economic and local renditions of hierarchy, stratification and class in Jaramana, see Chapter 2; 'middle class' is referred here to those loosely partaking in the global hierarchy of value as defined by Herzfeld 2004: 2–3.
5. Outside of Jaramana, the standard Arabic term for ululation is *zaghareed*.
6. 'A wonderful dish made of lean meat and fine burghul . . . which is shaped and stuffed, fried or baked and served in many different ways. This mild but delicious dish is counted amongst the special meals.' (Fadel and Schami 2005: 46–47).
7. This practice is similar to the Damascene Sunni tradition of gender segregation; the Druze of Suwayda hold a mixed gender celebration.
8. The details described have been collected through narratives and from video material, as I have not and could not attend the male ceremony.
9. Most of the songs sung are traditional marital chants, praising the bride, her beauty, chastity, fair colour, her mother and family. Metaphors are abundant, most of them comparing her to flowers or the moon, others saying how the groom's

side has come to take the bride on a horse. These songs/chants are known as *'āwīha* – the name and actual sound is used at the beginning of such chants and between double stanzas which are repeated by the audience/group (*jama'iyya*). These chants are polyphonic, usually with a main leader chanting the first line and the group repeating it and saying *'āwīha*. The leader of the chants changes every so often, with the mother of the groom playing a major role (especially at this instance), along with other special relatives and musically talented guests. The chants are based on prescribed structures and rhythms, use well-known metaphors and symbols, yet a lot if not most of them are on-the-spot improvisations.

10. Its duration can and does vary immensely, from 20 minutes to hours.
11. Kholud's premarital negotiations and engagement process took place quickly and in an unelaborated fashion, in private between the two families. What is usually a prolonged, public and ceremonial process, in Kholud's case included just the bare minimum of bureaucracy regarding the state and religious requirements: the registration at the Muslim religious court in central Damascus, and the Druze contract, *'aqad al-'aqd* (contracting the contract), conducted by two *shaykh*s.
12. Reception space, formal living room.
13. This is a powerful local belief in which Druze people physically resemble and look alike; here is an indicative quote from Kamal Joumblatt, Druze founder and leader of the Socialist Progressive Party in Lebanon:

    > One can always tell a Druse [sic], by his bearing and manners. The Druses are alert and lively but they behave with great dignity and courtesy in society. They are polite and use special words to express their emotions or to articulate their thoughts. They speak Arabic better than most, and much better than the Christians who do not pronounce the hard consonants. [. . .] Even their faces are different. If there is one Druse in a crowd of 20, it will always be easy to pick him out. Passing time has not changed our race, for custom forbids the Druses to marry outside their community: there were few exceptions to this rule.
    >
    > (Joumblatt 1982: 36)

    The 'exceptions' that Joumblatt mentions at the end of his speech include his own family tradition of marrying out with women of very high social status. Informants explain that in the case of families with the status of 'Emir', such as Joumblatt's, it is appropriate to marry a wife of equal social standing, even if that means that she could be non-Druze.
14. For a classic description of sexuality and gender, see Abu-Lughod 1986: 118–207; for critiques on gender, agency and colonialism, see Abu-Lughod 1990.

Chapter 5 Marriage, the State and Folklore Festivals

1. Of course, this was only possible because of the gift Cadmus gave to the Greeks: 'with the alphabet, the Greeks would teach themselves to experience the gods in the silence of the mind.' (Calasso 1993: 390).

2. As mentioned above, states are different from the sum of their institutional forms such as governments and regimes. However, in the Syrian case, there are certain correlations between state and regime since for the past 40 years these have been used simultaneously. I use ‘regime’ and ‘state’ interchangeably, although I understand how problematic that might be.
3. See Blacking and Kealiinohomoku (1979); Cowan (1990); Gell (1985, 1998); Hanna (1988); Schieffelin (1976); Shand (1998); Steingress (1998).
4. See Bauman (1977); Bateson (1972); Butler (1990); Cowan (1990); Goffman (1990 [1959]); Kirtsoglou (2004); Reed (1998); Savigliano (1995).
5. See Abu-Lughod (1986, 1989); Cowan (1990); Hanna (1988); Butler (1990); McNay (1992); Kirtsoglou (2004) – but see Manuel (1988) for a different view.
6. Examples of this emerging trend include Sheifa Zuhur’s edited volumes on performing arts (2000, 2003), and monographs such as Shannon’s ethnomusicology study of Syrian music and modernity (2006), Armbrust’s work on popular culture in Egypt (1996), van Nieuwkerk’s work on female singers and dancers in Cairo (1997 [1995]), and Potuoğlu-Cook’s analysis of the processes of neoliberal gentrification in Istanbul (2006), Salamandra focuses on Syrian melodrama and the ways it acts as an opportunity for covert political commentary (2004) as well as a medium of cultural production and dialogue. In an analytically vigorous light, Abu-Lughod (2002, 2005) analyses Egyptian melodrama as ‘popularizing a distinctive configuration of narrative, emotion and subjectivity’ in its introduction of a distinct ‘Western sensibility’ in the Egyptian household, employing Foucault’s notion of a ‘technology for the production of new kinds of selves’ (Ginsburg *et al.* 2002: 116).
7. In recent years the Bosra Festival has become annual, yet, as an anonymous employee in the Directorate of Theater and Music that oversees the organisation of the Festival notes, the state budget allocated has not significantly changed since the 1970s.
8. See Said 2009b, for details on the organisation of the festival and the international groups involved, such as groups from India, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Belgium, Russia and Netherlands. I attended the Bosra Festival in 2009 as a guest of the Directorate of Music and Theatre.
9. I attended Idleb Festival in 2009 as a formal guest of the Directorate of Music and Theatre.
10. Although the number of festivals has increased, the budgets for most of the festivals have not. In conversations and interviews with the staff of the Directorate of Theatre and Music, I was told that even though the Bosra festival is the oldest-running and one of the most successful festivals, its budget had not increased since 1971. Whereas such public engagements were once lavish and extravagant performances of statehood, presently it falls upon the public employees to ‘make-do’ with a limiting budget, inviting troupes based on affordability rather than fame or desirability. For example, the Bosra International Festival used to be one of the most celebrated festivals beyond

the borders of Syria with participants such as Fairouz, and a great variety of international, especially Eastern European participation.

11. This does not mean that folklore dance has ceased to exist. Local, usually smaller in size, dance troupes have emerged as volunteer clubs and associations, comprised mainly of youngsters, and especially in rural parts of Syria where groups attract a lot of attention and devotion from youths (usually unpaid) as spaces of participation and expression.
12. Specific examples first include festivals that are destined solely for external consumption, such as the Silk Road Festival, see below. Or, the 'high culture' festivals which take place in Damascus and Aleppo that are made up of artists and intellectuals. Theatre and cinema festivals are the oldest ones, but more recently the contemporary dance platform and the Aleppo women's festival were established. Last, examples of festivals destined for local consumption include the folklore festivals in Idleb, Suwayda and Lattakia. The Bosra International Festival belongs to this category because although 'international' the same folklore dance troupes still participate in it and the festival no longer has the international calibre in the eyes of the Syrians, whilst it virtually shares the same local folklore dance troupes that participate in all other local folklore festivals.
13. Every year locations and dates of the festival vary; the above were the locations of the 2008 Silk Road Festival, which took place between 10–15 October, and which I attended. In this section I combine my fieldwork with archival research and information I could find out about the Festival from other resources.
14. Observations are based on fieldwork material from Silk Road Festival in 2008.
15. Observations are based on fieldwork material as well as an interview with the Raqqa folklore group founder and director, Ismail al-Ujeili (April 2009) and interviews, focus groups and direct observation with dancers (June 2009).
16. As part of the 2010 celebrations of Silk Road Festival, Enana performed 'Zenobia the Queen of the East' in Palmyra:

    > Director of Tourism Promotion Department at the Ministry of Tourism Ahmad al-Youssef said the Ministry is keen on making Palmyra a main stop in the festival annually with the aim to familiarise foreign tourists with its great civilisation. 'The journey to Palmyra is a journey back to the deep-rooted past,' said a group of the journalists participating in the festival.
    >
    > (Haifa 2010)

17. This grand narrative is constructed through speeches in the Festival, Syrian media coverage and was portrayed in a personal interview with His Excellency Vice-Minister of Culture, Dr Ali al-Qayem (September 2009).
18. Based on audience accounts and general public's responses to such events during my fieldwork, I attended the Silk Road Festival in 2008.
19. Note that both artistic appropriations on stage as well as regional costumes vary greatly depending on region but also depending on individual affiliations and religiosity. The traditional dress of Bedouin women in the Raqqa region of north-eastern Syria, similarly to the Bedouin clothes in the Syrian Desert and

across the Iraqi border, may at times be considered unIslamic depending on Islamic doctrine, since hair and neck are not completely covered. On the other hand, Bedouins are known for their military might and autonomy, their clothes reflect this, and also Bedouin women are known for their free spirit that almost entitles them to a preferential treatment in terms of religious orthopraxy.

20. In the marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, apart maybe of some divine kinship, the concept as a whole is ubiquitously absent.

Chapter 6 Power, Resistance and Youth Politics

1. However, the institutionalisation and historical development of the military in Syria is different from Egypt. The military in Syria is strongly sectarian, and, specifically its high-ranking officials mainly belong to the Alawi sect, the same sect that the president belongs to. A similar division of power exists within the intelligence services, the *mukhābarāt*. The military as a sectarian institution dates back to the era of the French Mandate over Syria in which the colonial policy of divide-and-rule encouraged disenfranchised religious minorities to climb the ranks of the military and through it, to gain power (Khoury 1991b: 26–7). The military continued to be an alternative route to power by otherwise politically weak minorities after Syrian Independence and continues today.
2. Internet-related restrictions have recently been relaxed as a direct result of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings; see York 2011; *The Economist*, 2011.
3. See 'Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad', *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 January 2011, at: http://tinyurl.com/nmqy7c3 (accessed 27 June 2015).
4. Some recent examples of media coverage claiming the absence of 'civil society' in Syria include: Al-Jazeera's 'Syria: A Kingdom of Silence'; and Ammar Abdulhamid, 'Syria is Not Ready for an Uprising' in the *Guardian*.
5. 'Youth' was a troublesome category along with other social issues such as the status of women and dealing with the 'crowd' (Mitchell 1991: 118).
6. Marriages between Druze on either side of the border is one way to facilitate an ongoing interaction, with the expense of one of the spouses moving away from her/his natal place.
7. The song was sung in Sami's goodbye party by one of his male cousins, Sakher, who has been married 'into' Syria. People usually marry 'into' families not countries; this notion is more often applied to a new bride going into the family of her groom. But in Sakher's case, Syria was appropriately personified as his new family, since he had left Jowlan to be married with a Syrian Druze and to settle permanently there. Now, his cousin Sami was going back, and the next time he'd probably see him would be in the borders, divided by lines of ceasefire and rifles.
8. One anthropological reference to organisations of *jama'iyya* is in Khalaf's 1981 Ph.D. *Family, Village, and the Political Party* (pp. 168–71). Khalaf discusses how the Ba'th party since 1966, in an attempt to consolidate its popular base in

remote villages established official collectives such as *Al-Jama'iyya al-Fallahiyya* – Peasant Collective, whose aim was to gain support and reinforce official policies through popular involvement and mobilisation (Khalaf 1981: 173). Such officially registered associations, can be directly influenced by Party politics as mentioned by Khalaf, or could be similar to 'charitable organisations'. In order for a *jama'iyya* to be officially registered it needs the agreement of the Ministry of Culture or Work. For example, in Jaramana there are three such officially registered charitable associations: (1) *jama'iyya al-bi'a* (Environmental association); (2) *jama'iyya al-khayriyyeh* (a charity for Jaramana's poor); and (3) *jama'iyya al-moutaqāibin* (association of those retired). Such official organisations usually have a founding and organising committee, members have to pay a fee, and fees are concentrated in a common treasury and spent on some common goal, that is, on improving cleaning facilities, providing a stipend or award to a local student to continue to higher studies, or arranging an excursion.

9. The majority of people from Damascus that I talked to were involved in at least one *jama'iyya*.
10. Informants in rural places in Syria did not practise this kind of socio-economic formation.
11. Once I was told that a complex of apartment buildings had been built through the *jama'iyya* of seven Alawi military officers (sectarian as well as occupational members).
12. This type of 'gift' is connected to greater religious, social and metaphysical assumptions, which are not the subject of this chapter.
13. Quoted from Sivigliano (1995) to describe the complex processes of auto-exoticisation in the contexts of hegemonic post-coloniality. In Anna's case this could be referred to as self-Orientalising (also see methodology note in Chapter 1).
14. For a different version of history and society in the Middle East, see Ali 2003.
15. For example, see Comaroff and Comaroff 2002; Gilsenan 1996; Ortner 1995; Mitchell 1990; and Scott 1985.
16. Same religious sect marriage preference is not the only criterion in marriage negotiations; class and region also play important roles.
17. Even though both girls could be economically independent, they choose to live in the household of their parents.
18. Relations between parents and children, generally and in Syria particularly, are very complex affairs, which engage different realms of social, emotional, and economic 'ties that bind', and the realms of these complex relationships are never in themselves deterministic but ongoing and varying.
19. Wedeen (1999) views discrepancies between official rhetoric, citizens' public endorsement and private resistance to it as practices of 'as if' politics. Not withstanding the assumptions of public vs private dichotomies, Wedeen's analysis falls in the category of analysing resistance as 'impression management,

which makes of them [those who resist] cynical manipulators' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 47).

20. See Zagorin 2006; and Whitlock 2011.

Chapter 7 Dancing Marriage with Leish

1. See for example, the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar, Kan'an 2010; and the comments from the French and German Ambassadors in Damascus in SANA 2009. All press releases regarding Leish's performances have been kindly provided in English translations from the troupe's archive.
2. 'Through research and experimentation, our work aims to construct a Movement Theatre vocabulary particular to the current Arabic context by identifying the symbols we use to construct the sentences, paragraphs, and eventually the stories of our lives. Movement Theatre is a modern artistic form that uses the body and voice (not words), as the primary tools in storytelling. We collaborate with artists across disciplines, bringing dancers, singers, musicians, and actors together in our performances. Through a variety of creative methods, Leish's work aims to dissolve the traditional boundary between observer and observed' (brochure of Leish troupe, 2009).
3. NM: Not only because it gives us different spaces to work with, but [we chose] 'tight' places, like all your choices in everyday life: limited and small (13 July 2010).
4. Although this was argued by Diana Jodo-Hokan, German-born organiser of Women's Festival in Aleppo, during a personal interview, 16 October 2010.
5. See Stirrat and Henkel (1997); for NGOs as state formations see Ali (1996, 2000) and Trouillot (2001: 132); for anthropological debates regarding universal human rights, see Cowan *et al.* (2001).
6. For a good critique on why states are not becoming obsolete, see Harvey 2009. For an analysis of the ways the contemporary European Union resembles an Empire, see Zielonka 2007.
7. See Chapter 6, for an analysis of 'culture' as used by the Syrian state as a politically unthreatening category.
8. Hierogamy (gk.) literally means sacred (*hieros*) nuptial (*gamia*).
9. To see how tradition is used as local stratification, see Chapter 2.
10. In his opening speech for the conference 'Dance/Body at the crossroads of culture', Nicosia, Cyprus, 2011. My attendance to the conference was funded by Wolfson Institute.

Chapter 8 The Intimate and Violent Struggles Ahead

1. My friends insisted then that Kassioun is not a party but a movement, a trend, a current associated with Kassioun newspaper (*http://kassioun.org*). The current, established in the early 2000s, aimed to unite leftists outside the two official Syrian communist parties and was headed by Qadri Jamil. After participating in

the Syrian uprising, in 2012, the movement turned into an official party, the People's Will Party (PWP). PWL joined forces with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, forming the Popular Front for Change and Liberation. The front participated in the 2012 Syrian parliamentary elections and won five seats in the parliament. Qadri Jamil was briefly appointed deputy prime minister for economic affairs (from June 2012 until October 2013).

2. For an astonishingly vivid portrayal of the cult of Atatürk, see Navaro-Yashin 2002: 188–203.

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